

Pest Profile



Photo credit: J.A. MacGown, Mississippi Entomological Museum, Mississippi State University

Common Name: Black Imported Fire Ant (BIFA)

Scientific Name: *Solenopsis richteri*

Order and Family: Order Hymenoptera; Family Formicidae

Size and Appearance:

	Length (mm)	Appearance
Egg		
Larva/Nymph		
Adult	Workers: 1.0 – 4.0 mm (polymorphic)	All fire ants are characterized by several body features, including a relatively boxy-shaped head; 10-segmented antennae with the last two segments enlarged as a club; the lack of spines on the back; a two-part waist; a prominent stinger; and a cuticle typically free of texture or sculpture. BIFA workers are further characterized by being a shiny dark or black in color, possibly with some reddish areas. Female and male reproductive ants have wings. Males are black. Queens resemble workers. More than one queen may be present in a colony.
Pupa (if applicable)		

Type of feeder (Chewing, sucking, etc.): Chewing

Host(s): The BIFA is omnivorous, primarily eating other insects. These include a variety of ground beetles, cucumber beetles, stink bugs, house flies, mealy bugs, long-horned grasshoppers, as well as ticks, spiders, worms, and arthropod eggs. They also feed on sweets, including honeydew from hemipterans such as aphids and scale insects that feed on plant juices.

Description of Damage (larvae and adults):

The BIFA is an invasive species and as such, it outcompetes and eats other, native ant species. BIFA is omnivorous, eating both plants and animals, including arthropods, birds, reptiles, and mammals. Thus, BIFA may disrupt the ecosystem. They are also significant pests on a variety of agricultural crops, including potatoes.

The BIFA does have a dangerous sting with venom that affects humans. A sting may result in itching, redness, and the development of pustules which resolve in a few days. However, some people may have an allergic reaction and need medical treatment.

These ants may nest under human structures such as foundations, resulting in structural problems. Nests located in agricultural areas may damage harvesting and other equipment.

The ants are also attracted to electrical equipment, resulting in short circuiting.

The BIFA is originally from South America but is now found in the Southern USA in Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.

References:

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