

Fighting Fire Ants

By: A Farmer

In Florida, the #1 outdoor enemy are fire ants. Unlike the big, passive, black ants of my youth in Maine and Ohio, Florida's Fire Ants are organized, ruthless and relentless. Battling these beasts in a survival situation will become a top priority for those of us in the south.

If you place anything (heaven forbid - yourself) near an ant mound for any period of time - like 8 seconds or more - it will be claimed by the ants. In armies, they mount the object silently and gently. In the case of your foot, you won't notice them on your shoe, nor even feel them as they board your foot or ankle. Some will go into your shoe, others will cling to your socks - faster ones will find your leg above the sock. As if on some silent command, they will all bite simultaneously - inside your shoe, right through your sock and on the unprotected skin above your sock. You can't get them all and they know it. And no matter how many of them you get while slapping yourself and undressing, they will know they got you and caused you great torment. Their bites will leave welts that will itch worse than any mosquito bite or poison ivy rash you've ever endured.

In the case of an object such as a potted plant, hub cap or trash can, the beasts will cover it, find the crevices in it and set up housekeeping - until you try to reclaim the item by picking it up. That's when they all board your hand and wrist in the same fashion - with the same objective - to defeat you.

There are chemicals available on the market to defeat individual mounds, but in the case of several acres of property, their use is financially unrealistic. That's where a little ingenuity and a lot of trial and error come in.

Dare I be cruel and inhumane? The easiest way to defeat a mound is with boiling water. Get out the tea kettle, fill it with water and bring it to a boil. While the water comes to a boil, bait the ants with a drop of honey, banana peel, bread crumbs, dog or cat food - anything handy. They'll come for the treat - then douse them and their mound with the steaming water.

That's the best solution to mounds near high-traffic areas like at the foot of the stoop or near the steps to the house. But what about feed bags and feed bins in the barn, shed or garage - or even on your porch? The best preventive I've found is Avon's Skin So Soft bath oil. I know SSS is not a secret, but its length of life might be. I keep horse and dog feed in trash cans in the barn. Ants used to be a problem until I liberally applied SSS to the outside tops of the (feed) trash cans. Fire ants will not cross the SSS border. I treated three such trash cans in my barn over a year ago and still have no ants getting in with the feed.

Similarly, I keep BBQ charcoal in a trashcan on my porch. The ants found that too good a place to resist, too. I treated the outside with a rag dampened with SSS and haven't had any trouble with them since.

In the case of camping, keep a spray bottle with equal parts SSS and water. Shake vigorously just before spraying and spray the ground where your tent meets the ground and all parts under the tent. This will keep the ants out of your tent, off your tent and away from your gear.

Use this mixture to spray your dog's paws and legs to keep Fido comfortable during outdoor adventures, too.

For those times you don't "plan" on being outdoors or without shelter, keep SSS handy in the form of paper towels dampened with SSS and kept in a ziplock bag in your pocket or purse. Alternately, cut the dampened paper towel in several sections and fold small sections inside saran wrap or other cling film for future use. This will fit nicely in any wallet.

For when TSHTF, all of my caches have SSS-treated towels in them - and a large unopened bottle is in one of them. In Florida, it's essential.