

Managing potted plants in a fire ant biosecurity zone

To prevent the spread of one of the world's most invasive pests, potted plants need to be carefully managed in the fire ant biosecurity zones.

Fire ant biosecurity zones

There are two fire ant biosecurity zones established under the *Biosecurity Act 2014* to help control the movement of materials that may carry fire ants. If you work or live in these zones, then you may need to undertake risk mitigation activities to prevent the human-assisted spread of fire ants. Not complying with requirements can result in penalties.

Potted plants contain high risk materials (e.g. soil or commercial potting media) requiring careful management to help prevent the spread of fire ants. If you are moving plants within the fire ant biosecurity zones, you must comply with the Queensland legislation regardless of whether the destination is within Queensland or interstate. This is in addition to any other entry requirements imposed by the destination State or Territory. Check out the fire ant biosecurity zones and requirements at fireants.org.au.

What do I need to do?

The Biosecurity Regulation 2016 (Regulation) outlines how potted plants must be managed in the [fire ant biosecurity zones](http://fireants.org.au). Follow the methods on this fact sheet unless the pots are:

- moved directly to a waste facility, subject to the zone restrictions below
- have been at the property for less than 24 hours.

Insecticide treatments or the correct storage of potted plants are the two key methods to reduce the risk of moving fire ants in potted plants. At least one of these methods must be used to be considered effective risk mitigation.

For those wishing to avoid chemical treatments, correct storage on its own can prevent fire ants from infesting potted plants.

Moving plants off site

It is an offence to move a live fire ant from a property. You can only move potted plants within, across or outside the [fire ant biosecurity zones](http://fireants.org.au) if you either:

- follow treatment and storage methods outlined in this fact sheet,
- transport the product directly to a nearby waste facility in accordance with the following zone restrictions:
 - material from zone 1 can be moved to a waste facility within zone 1 or 2
 - material from zone 2 can be moved to a waste facility within zone 2 only
- move the material within 24 hours of it arriving at the original place.

Find out what zone you are in at fireants.org.au.

If you are unable to fulfil these requirements you cannot move potted plants from within the fire ant biosecurity zones unless the program approves different risk mitigations through a [biosecurity instrument permit \(BIP\)](http://fireants.org.au). You can apply for a [BIP](http://fireants.org.au) online at fireants.org.au or by calling **13 25 23**.

Storing

Correct storage is vital to ensuring potted plants remain free from fire ants. If a potted plant does not have any treatment protection, and will remain on the property for more than 24 hours, you must use the following storage options:

- off-ground and covered, or
- on-ground and covered, either on:
 - concrete or bitumen (no cracks)
 - a barrier that cannot be penetrated by fire ants (e.g. 200 micron unperforated plastic sheeting)
 - compacted ground (other than sand) that has been treated with an appropriate chemical product before storage.

Use a chemical treatment around the entire on-ground storage area. This should be a 30 cm wide strip of insecticide containing bifenthrin. Check the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) permit to ensure you use the correct method, amount and concentration.

Keep the treated area free of material that could form an untreated 'bridge' from the ground to the pots.

Find information about the chemical treatment on the APVMA permit PER14317 (expires 29 February 2024).

We offer free fire ant training, including how to treat with chemicals. Book at ants.daf.qld.gov.au.



Treating

Treating potted plants helps minimise the risk of fire ant infestation.

All insecticides must be used in accordance with the conditions of the APVMA permit and the product's label. You can search for permits on the APVMA website at portal.apvma.gov.au/permits

Granular insecticides in potting mix

If using bifenthrin or chlorpyrifos in potting mix, the product's dosage rate determines the protection period.

Bifenthrin can protect potted plants for more than 24 months and chlorpyrifos for up to 12 months.

Pesticide name and permit number	Permit expiry date	Situation(s)
Bifenthrin (granular) PER13959	31/03/2023	Nursery stock (non-food and non-bearing fruit trees).
Chlorpyrifos (granular) PER14256	30/9/2025	Container grown, ornamental nursery plants.

Drenching or dipping

The protection period varies depending on the insecticide used:

- Bifenthrin —28 days protection
- Cyfluthrin —72 hours protection.

Pesticide name and permit number	Permit expiry date	Situation(s)
Bifenthrin PER14317	29/02/2024	Potted/containerised root-balled plants
Cyfluthrin PER12073	31/04/2025	Potted plants

Spraying

Only potted plants stored at least 30 cm off the ground on a mesh grid are eligible for this treatment.

You must spray the surface of the potted plant and ensure at least 2 cm of potting media gets thoroughly soaked. Structural supports for any off-ground storage must be sprayed as well.

The protection period for bifenthrin when using this method is 28 days.

Pesticide name and permit number	Permit expiry date	Situation(s)
Bifenthrin PER14317	29/02/2024	Potted plants stored off-ground , as an alternative to drench/dip methods

Keeping records

You must keep written records of the steps you have taken to ensure potted plants are stored or treated correctly, including which chemical product was used and the method of treatment undertaken.

