

Managing potted plants in a fire ant biosecurity zone

To prevent the spread of one of the world's most invasive pests, risk mitigation controls must be used when managing pot plants in fire ant biosecurity zones.

Fighting fire ants

The National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program (program) is responsible for managing fire ant eradication in Australia.

The program's [10-year Eradication Plan](#) began in 2017 to commence eradication of the fire ant infestation in South East Queensland. By using a staged, rolling treatment program from west to east, it aims to rid Australia of this invasive pest in partnership with the Queensland community. The program is funded by all Australian states and territories, and the Commonwealth Government.

The *Biosecurity Act 2014 (Act)* aims to improve Queensland's biosecurity preparedness and response capabilities by managing biosecurity risks and the significant impacts animal and plant diseases and pests could have on our economy, agricultural and other industries, environment and lifestyle.

Fire ants are a category 1 restricted matter under the *Act*. It is a requirement under the *Act* to report suspect fire ants to the program within 24 hours.

What's a biosecurity zone?

There are two [fire ant biosecurity zones](#) established under the *Act* to help control the movement of materials that may carry fire ants. If you are operating or residing in these zones then you are required to undertake risk mitigation activities to prevent the human-assisted spread of fire ants. Not complying with requirements can result in penalties. Find out more about biosecurity zones at [daf.qld.gov.au/fireants](#)

Potted plants contain high risk carrier materials (e.g. soil) requiring careful management to help prevent the spread of fire ants.

What do I need to do?

The Biosecurity Regulation 2016 (Regulation) outlines how potted plants must be managed in fire ant biosecurity zones. Follow the methods outlined in this document unless the pots are:

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

If you are unable to do either, you must request a [biosecurity instrument permit \(BIP\)](#) from the program by calling **13 25 23** or via [daf.qld.gov.au/fireants](#)

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

Treating

Applying an appropriate treatment to potted plants helps minimise the risk of fire ant infestation.

All insecticides must be used in accordance with the conditions of the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) permit and in compliance with 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 (see over).

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. Can also be used by the general public.

Drenching or dipping

The protection period varies depending on the insecticide used, such as:

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

Pesticide name and permit number	Permit expiry date	Situation(s)
Bifenthrin PER14317	31/12/2021	Potted/containerised root-balled plants
Cyfluthrin PER12073	31/03/2025	Potted plants
Chlorpyrifos PER13504	30/09/2027	Potted, containerised or bagged plants (non-bearing fruit trees).

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.

Treatment is required around the entire on-ground storage area by applying a 30 cm wide strip of appropriate perimeter treatment, such as insecticides containing 500 g/L chlorpyrifos or 80 g/L bifenthrin.

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

For an insecticide registered as a horizontal or perimeter barrier for fire ants, refer to APVMA permit PER14317 (expires 31 December 2021).

The program offers free fire ant pest management training including how to treat with chemicals. Book at ants.daf.qld.gov.au

Moving

You may move potted plants within, across or outside the fire ant [biosecurity zones](#) if you:

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

If you are unable to fulfil these requirements then you must request a [BIP](#). Apply by calling **13 25 23** or via daf.qld.gov.au/fireants

Keeping a record

You should keep a written record of the steps you have taken to ensure potted plants are stored correctly, including which chemical product was used and the method of treatment undertaken. These records should be kept for a minimum of two years.

More information

The program conducts free training sessions about the identification of the super pest and high risk material management. Book at ants.daf.qld.gov.au

Visit daf.qld.gov.au/fireants or contact the program on **13 25 23** for further information.