

Can club soda control fire ants?

An email is making its rounds touting the attributes of club soda as a means to do in fire ants. The email may be spreading faster than the infamous fire ants. Don't believe everything on the Internet or in emails.

I've been getting questions from folks asking me about this home remedy of using club soda (carbonated water) to control the pesky pest. A portion of the email reads, "An environmentally friendly cure for fire ants has been announced by Walter Reeves on his Georgia Gardener radio program. Testimonials that it REALLY WORKS are coming in." This got my attention because I know Walter Reeves. Walter is a retired Extension Agent from the Atlanta, Georgia area who now has a well listened to radio program, gardening website, TV program, etc.

I contacted Walter and as I expected was told that his "endorsement" of this practice is only a rumor. As he states on his website (WalterReeves.com) concerning this rumor, "...a bit of Internet hyperbole has arisen." Reeves also states, "I have not 'endorsed' the pouring of club soda onto fire ant mounds. From several replies that I've gotten, club soda has no effect on fire ants. The insects simply rebuild their mounds afterwards. The carbon dioxide atmosphere in the mound does not linger long enough to suffocate any ants. Baits and mound treatments are still the best way to control fire ants."

Dr. Phil Koehler, UF/IFAS Extension Entomologist, concurs. In an email reply to me, Koehler stated, "Club soda is not an effective way of killing fire ants. There was one study that investigated the carbon dioxide concentrations of fire ant mounds and found they are really tolerant of high carbon dioxide levels. In fact, they seem to prefer high carbon dioxide. I don't think that club soda will kill any fire ants at all. This is another folk tale similar to the instant grits. Supposedly, ants explode when they eat instant grits sprinkled on their mounds. Grits don't work, club soda doesn't work either. Often putting things like grits and soda on a mound just causes the mound to move because of the disturbance. Fire ant baits work really well."

When I contacted Walter, I asked him if he'd be OK with me writing an article on this topic to help "set the record straight" in Northwest Florida. He responded, "Anything you can do to kill this Internet rumor is fine with me!"

For science based information on controlling fire ants, contact your UF/IFAS County Extension Office or visit <http://solutionsforyourlife.com>.

Larry Williams, UF/IFAS Extension Agent, Okaloosa County, January 26, 2010