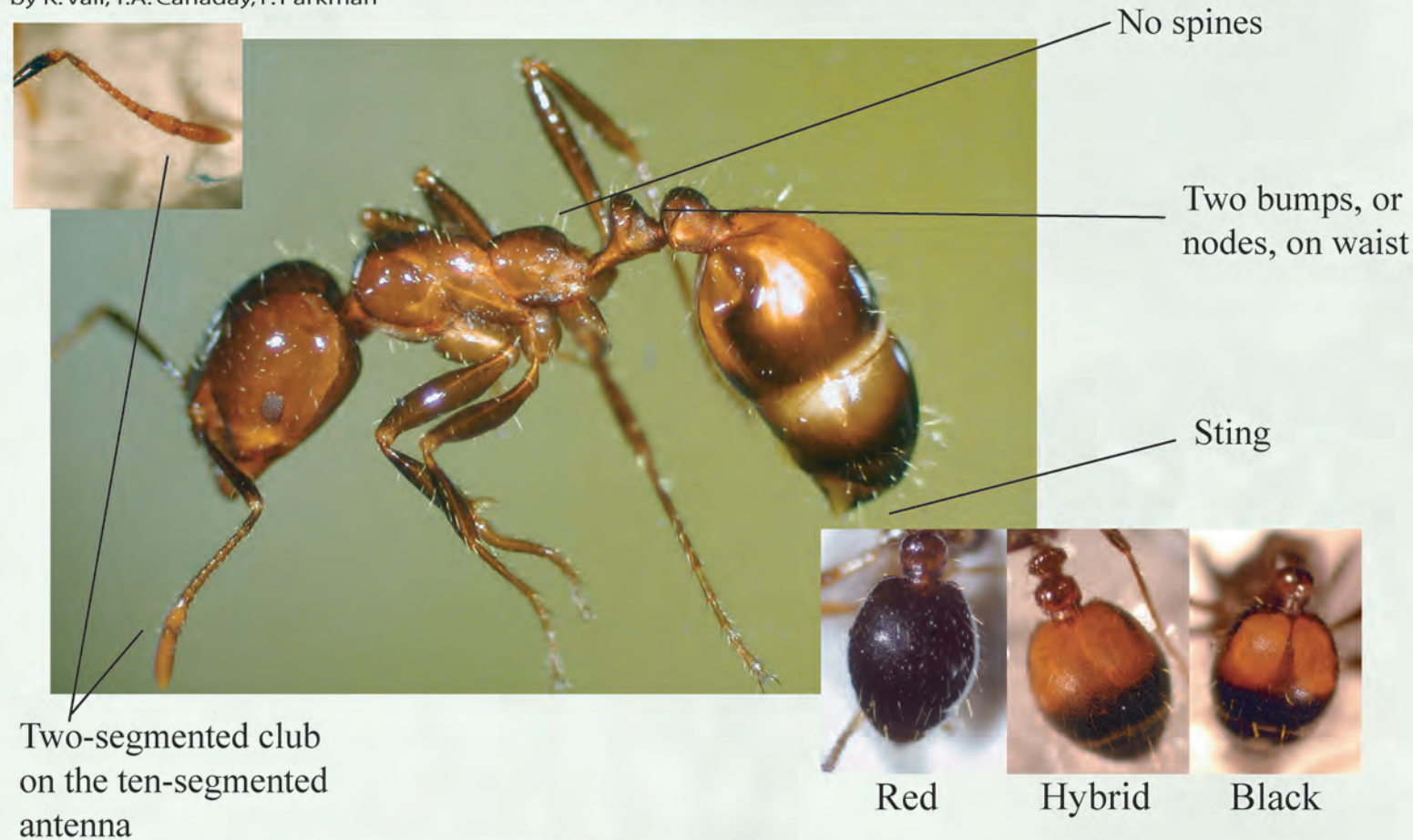


Fire Ants: What they are and what they aren't

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How to Distinguish Fire Ants

Fire ants are non-native ants that are currently expanding their Tennessee range. Their name originates from their sting which causes a burning sensation and can cause blistering. Distinguishing physical features of these ants are illustrated in the pictures above. Within a colony, the ants are different sizes ranging from 1/8" to 1/4" in length. As with other ants, winged males and females can be found in the nest. See the section to the right on Tennessee ants to further distinguish fire ants from other local ants. There are three types of imported fire ants: red, black, and hybrid. Red imported fire ants have reddish-brown bodies and dark abdomens. Black imported fire ants have dark brown or black bodies and two well defined golden patches on their abdomens. Hybrid imported fire ants have intermediate features with less defined golden patches on their abdomens. Another strong indication of fire ants is the presence of large mounds (See "Mounds of Tennessee Ants").

Tennessee Ants Commonly Encountered or Mistaken for Fire Ants

The first step in identifying any kind of ant it to look at its waist, or petiole, to see if it consists of one or two segments.
Key: = Mound builder; = Has a sting; = Sprays formic acid (can irritate skin); = Releases odor

Ants with One-Node Waists

Ants with one node are NEVER fire ants.

Forelius Ant *Forelius spp.*

 A. One-node waist
 B. Small (1/16"-1/8")
 C. Light brown to gold abdomen
 D. Slit on underside of abdomen
 E. Sweet odor when crushed

Odorous House Ant *Tapinoma sessile*

 A. One-node waist
 B. Small (about 1/8"-3/16")
 C. Slit on underside of abdomen
 D. Flattened node
 E. Rotten coconut odor

False Honey Ant *Prenolepis imparis*

 A. One-node waist
 B. Small (1/8"-3/16")
 C. Circle of hairs on end of abdomen
 D. Figure-eight shaped thorax when viewed from above

Field Ant *Formica spp.*

 A. One-node waist
 B. Large (over 3/8")
 C. Uneven profile of thorax
 D. Three simple eyes on forehead

Allegheny Mound Ant *Formica spp.*

 A. One-node waist
 B. Large (1/4"-3/8")
 C. Uneven profile of thorax
 D. Three simple eyes on forehead
 E. Dark gaster but red head and thorax

Cornfield Ant *Lasius spp.*

 A. One-node waist
 B. Small (about 1/8")
 C. Circle of hairs on end of abdomen

Carpenter Ant *Camponotus spp.*

 A. One-node waist
 B. Large (1/4"-1/2")
 C. Evenly rounded profile of thorax
 D. No simple eyes on forehead

Ants with Two-node Waists

Look at other characters to distinguish from fire ants.

Neivamyrmex Ant *Neivamyrmex spp.*

 A. Two-node waist
 B. Small to medium (1/8"-1/4")
 C. No spine
 D. Tiny eyes

Little Black Ant *Monomorium spp.*

 A. Two-node waist
 B. Very small (about 1/16")
 C. No spine
 D. 3-segmented club on 12-segmented antenna

Acrobat Ant *Crematogaster spp.*

 A. Two-node waist
 B. Small (1/8"-3/16")
 C. Pair of spines on segment before waist
 D. Heart-shaped abdomen
 E. Waist attached to top of abdomen

Aphaenogaster Ant *Aphaenogaster spp.*

 A. Two-node waist
 B. Medium to large (3/16"-1/4")
 C. Pair of spines on segment before waist
 D. Step-like thorax
 E. Nests in soil or rotting logs

Big-Headed Ant *Pheidole spp.*

 A. Two-node waist
 B. Small to very small (1/16"-3/16")
 C. Two distinct worker castes
 D. Major workers have enlarged heads
 E. Pair of spines on segment before waist

Pavement Ant *Tetramorium caespitum*

 A. Two-node waist
 B. Small (about 1/8")
 C. Pair of spines on segment before waist
 D. Distinct grooves along head and body

A Wasp, Not An Ant

Velvet "Ant" Family Mutillidae

 A. A wasp
 B. Females wingless
 C. Males winged
 D. Very large (can be over 1")
 E. Red to orange color
 F. Black stripes on abdomen
 G. Fuzzy texture

Mounds of Tennessee Ants

Allegheny Mound Ant Mounds

 * Mounds as large or larger than fire ants'
 * Can be 2' tall and several feet in diameter
 * No central opening

Lasius Ant Mounds

 * Smaller mounds than fire ants'
 * Normally 1"-2" tall, less than 1' diameter
 * Defined central opening
 * Often found under trees, shrubs, and leaf litter

Field Ant Mounds

 * Shorter than fire ant mounds
 * Usually, mounds will not be taller than grass
 * Multiple openings into nest
 * Mounds found under shrubs, mulch, rocks and other debris

Forelius Ant Mounds

 * Smaller mounds than fire ants'
 * Normally 1"-2" tall, less than 1' diameter
 * Defined central opening

False Honey Ant Mounds

 * Smaller mounds than fire ants'
 * Mounds range from a few inches to close to a foot in diameter
 * Mound may have crater-shaped appearance
 * Much shorter mounds than fire ants
 * Mounds often found in shady, open areas such as flower beds

Pavement Ant Mounds

 * Smaller mounds than fire ants'
 * Normally 1"-2" tall
 * Mound may have crater-shaped appearance
 * Often found along edges of sidewalks and foundations



Fire Ant Mounds
 * Initially a few inches tall, but can grow 18"-24" tall
 * Mature mounds usually over a foot in diameter
 * No opening in center
 * If mound disturbed, workers run up any vertical surfaces
 * If mound disturbed, workers repeatedly bite and sting