Solenopsis invicta

Red Imported Fire Ant | Care Sheet

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KEEPING LEVEL	ORIGIN	NEST TEMPERATURE	NEST HUMIDITY	WORKERS BEFORE NEST
Expert	South America	24–26°C	~80%	10+

🐜 At a glance

Origin	🌎 South America
Keeping level	Expert — fast-growing escape artists with a painful sting. Adults only
Queen	Around 6–9mm
Workers	Small, 3–6mm, reddish-brown
Founding	Fully claustral — but we recommend a drop of protein jelly once a week
Colony form	Many queens (polygyne); up to 250,000 workers in the wild
Nest temperature	24–26°C day and night
Nest humidity	Around 80%; outworld room humidity
Workers before moving into a nest	10+
Winter	No hibernation — keep warm all year

📖 About this species

The famous fire ant: smart, superbly organised and incredibly fast-growing. We started a colony with 5 queens and around 50 workers in April 2014, and by November of the same year it had around 5,000 workers. They will escape if they need more water, food or space, so a fresh PTFE band is a must. They only sting if the queen is threatened or they are squashed — but the sting is painful.

> ⚠️ **Sting: fire ants bite and sting, and the sting burns. Adults only — never handle the ants, use long tweezers.**

📦 When your ants arrive

- ⚠️ **MOST IMPORTANT:** leave the parcel completely unopened, exactly as it arrived, at room temperature for **5 hours**. The ants must adjust to your home's temperature gradually — abrupt temperature changes make ants seriously unwell.
- After the 5 hours, check the queen is safe and sound, then leave the colony in its original packaging (test tube still in its tin foil and wrapping) in a quiet spot — in daylight, never direct sunlight — away from vibration and daily household activity.
- 😴 Give the colony **4 to 5 days** of complete rest. The ants were fed before dispatch and need nothing from you during this time. Assemble and water the nest while you wait.
- Still workers or a motionless queen after delivery are almost always delivery stress. Check the antennae: moving antennae means she is fine. Almost all recover within 4 to 5 days (a little longer for bigger queens).
- 👑 A queen on her own: keep her test tube wrapped in its tin foil, undisturbed, and feed her once a week — a tiny drop of protein jelly, about half a grain of rice, on a small flat piece of tin foil placed inside the tube next to the dry cotton stopper. In our experience a fed queen is stronger and her brood develops about 30% faster.

🏠 Moving into the ant farm

- Keep the colony in its test tube until it has **at least 10 workers**. Moved earlier, the workers often abandon the queen in the larger space, which can lead to colony failure. A queen bought on her own, with no workers yet, needs a little longer: she stays in her test tube until she has 15+ workers.
- Connect the test tube to the nest with the delivery tin foil still on and leave it for 14 days. Then slide the foil back about 1mm every day until the tube is fully exposed to daylight.
- If the ants have not moved in 2 days after the tube is fully exposed, wrap the foil back on, wait another fortnight and repeat the whole process — patience is the key. Moving in happens on the ants' own time: anywhere from a couple of days to 6 months.
- The red filter and black cover stay on the nest at all times — it is pitch dark inside. The black cover can come off once a day for 2 to 3 minutes (ideally at night); the red filter once a week for 2 to 3 minutes.
- ☀️ Place the ant farm in normal daylight, never direct sunlight (the sun can overheat a nest within minutes). Avoid windows, radiators and heaters, vibrating surfaces, speakers and TVs, strong smells such as the kitchen, and busy walkways. Keep a steady room temperature.

🍯 Feeding

- 🔬 Small ants need small portions: a drop the size of half a grain of rice is plenty for a young colony.
- 🍯 Sugars for worker energy: our organic ant honey (lab-tested at 81% carbohydrate) or Best Ants UK Ant Nectar (90% dextrose, an even richer energy source) — never sugar water or home-made mixes.
- 🥩 Protein for the queen and brood: Best Ants UK Protein Jelly or NextSwarm Cricket Mash. Keep protein jelly in the fridge at all times once opened. They love protein and grow fast when it is plentiful.
- Feed twice a week, small amounts, in the outworld only. Remove leftovers after 2 days to prevent mould.
- 🦗 Live food (mealworms, crickets, locusts) is only for established colonies, never small ones. All bought live food carries tiny mites that can destroy a colony, so always scald it first: hold it with tweezers in just-boiled water (no longer bubbling) for 10 to 15 seconds, then chop it in half and serve on a small tin foil tray.

💧 Watering the nest

- 💧 Use **distilled or purified water only** — never tap, rainwater or bottled mineral water, even boiled. They carry minerals and microbes that turn a nest green with mould. A litre of distilled water costs a few pounds and lasts over a year.
- Water the nest with the pipette provided: pour slowly, a few drops at a time, through the watering hole, and stop as soon as 1 or 2 drops appear inside the nest — that is how you know it is done correctly. More than that is too much.
- Once a week is usually right — slightly more in summer, less in winter. Never water the outworld.

🌡️ Temperature and winter

- 🌴 No hibernation. Solenopsis invicta comes from a warm climate and must stay at 24–26°C day and night all year round — in a UK home this means gentle heating in the cooler months.
- Use the Advanced Heating System Small 4W warming no more than a quarter of the nest, on the side opposite the water inlet, so the ants can choose their temperature. For a colony still in its test tube, use the Heating Mat with Thermostat Small 4W and heat only about 25mm of the tube, at the end opposite the water — never lay the whole tube on the mat.
- Never let the colony get cold, and never expose it to abrupt temperature changes.

🤩 Did you know?

- When their nest floods, fire ants link their bodies together into a living raft that can float for days.

- “Invicta” means “unconquered” in Latin — fitting for one of the most successful invasive ants on Earth.

⭐ Golden rules | Never break these

- 🚫 Never put ants in a fridge, and never expose them to abrupt temperature changes. Cold does not kill a colony instantly — the ants get sick and die over the following days.
- 🚫 Never use gel ant farms, Ytong or concrete nests, or DIY nests.
- 🚫 Never use tap, rain or mineral water, even boiled.
- 🚫 Never move a colony into a nest too early, and never tip or shake ants out of their tube.
- 🚫 Never disturb the colony with tapping or handling — vibration stresses the queen and she can stop laying or eat her eggs.
- ☀️ Never keep the farm in the dark: ants need daylight for their circadian rhythm. Daylight yes — direct sunlight never.
- 🧤 Never handle these ants or let children handle the setup — always use long tweezers and keep the lid closed and the PTFE band fresh.
- 🧱 Escape artists: keep a fresh PTFE band around the top inner edge of the outworld lid at all times, and never leave the lid open.
- 🚫 Never release this species into the wild — a colony raised in an ant farm would not survive. If you can no longer keep it, visit our ants adoption page and ask us whether we can adopt it.

🛒 Recommended for this species

- Solenopsis invicta colonies
- A7 Plus Ant Farm Kit
- Advanced Heating System 4W
- PTFE Escape Barrier
- Protein Jelly
- Cricket Mash
- Organic Honey
- Ant Nectar

📚 These care notes cover the essentials only. Please read the full ant farm setup guide and Solenopsis invicta product page from A to Z. Questions? Message us through our contact form and we will be happy to help. 💚

Written and reviewed by the Best Ants UK team, keeping ants since 1997.