

Potted Plant Management in Fire Ant Biosecurity Zones

The long distance movement of fire ants often occurs because of human activity, particularly through the transport of infested potted plants.

The Biosecurity Regulation 2016 prescribes procedures and management techniques that you must follow when storing and moving potted plants from a property within a [fire ant biosecurity zone](#).

You must follow the management techniques, listed below, unless:

- the material is moved directly to a [waste facility](#) (zone restrictions apply), or
- the material has been at the property for less than 24 hours, or
- you bare root the plant and re-pot it at the final destination. This is NOT considered to be a fire ant carrier and can be moved without further treatment.

If you are unable to comply with these conditions then you must request a [biosecurity instrument permit](#) from an inspector.

Residents living in a biosecurity zone

Residents may move potted plants (non-commercial) with a volume **less than 60 litres per pot** to any location within Queensland as per permit [BIP-RIFA-16G004](#). The permit requires you to inspect the plants for fire ants before the movement and to report suspect ants to Biosecurity Queensland.

Any contractors, e.g. removalists who may be moving potted plants, also need to ensure the plants have been checked. You are not required to keep a copy of the permit for your records, however if you hire a removalist they may ask to see the permit.

Failure to comply with the permit is an offence and penalties may apply.

Alternatively, you can completely remove the potting medium from the plant's roots, and repot when you get to your destination.

Management techniques for plant sellers

Commercial operators or private operators who are selling plants for profit, e.g. market stall operators, must adhere to the Regulation and follow the management and storage techniques below.

By using appropriate management techniques, you can help prevent infestation and spread of fire ants. Insecticide treatments and correct storage of potted plants are the 2 key management techniques to reduce the risk of fire ant infestation in potted plants.

Treatment of potted plants

Applying an appropriate treatment to potted plants helps minimise the risk of fire ant infestation. A written record must be kept stating the chemical product used and the way it was used for the treatment.

Preventative treatment methods include:

- incorporating granular insecticides in potting media
- drenching of pot plants
- dipping pot plants.

The table below lists [Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority \(APVMA\)](#) approved pesticides and the situations to use them and their treatment methods.

Pesticide name and permit number	Permit expiry date	Situation(s)	Treatment methods
Bifenthrin* PER13959	31 March 2018	Container grown nursery stock (non-food and non-bearing fruit trees)	Incorporated in potting media
Chlorpyrifos* PER14256	30 September 2018	Container grown ornamental nursery plants Can be used by persons generally	Incorporated in potting media
Bifenthrin PER14317	31 December 2021	Container grown ornamentals (non-bearing fruit trees)	Pot drench/dip
Cyfluthrin PER12073	31 March 2020	Potted/containerised/bagged plants Can be used by persons generally	Pot drench
Chlorpyrifos PER13504	30 September 2017	Potted/containerised/bagged plants (non-bearing fruit trees) Can be used by persons generally	Pot drench/dip

*If incorporating bifenthrin or chlorpyrifos granular insecticides into potting media, 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.

Drenching or dipping

For pot drenching or dipping the protection period varies depending on the insecticide used:

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

All insecticides must be used in accordance with the conditions of the APVMA permit and in conjunction with the product's label.

Storage of potted plants

Correct storage is vital to ensure that potted plants remain free from fire ants.

If a potted plant does not have any treatment protection (see Treatment of potted plants above) and will remain on the property for over 24 hours it must be covered in a way that prevents fire ants from infesting, in conjunction with any of the storage methods listed below.

Off-ground storage

- If storing potted plants off the ground (e.g. storage racks), they must be covered.

On-ground storage

On-ground storage must be on either:

- concrete or bitumen, that does not contain cracks
- a barrier that cannot be penetrated by fire ants e.g. 200 micron unperforated plastic sheeting
- an area of compacted ground, other than sand, that has been treated with an appropriate chemical product before storage.

If stored on the ground, treatment is required around the storage area by applying a 30cm wide strip of appropriate perimeter treatment. Use an insecticide containing 500g/L chlorpyrifos or 80g/L bifenthrin. Keep the treated area free of material that could form an untreated 'bridge' to the potted plants.

Refer to APVMA permits PER14718 (expires 30 June 2019) and PER14317 (expires 31 December 2021) for insecticides registered as a horizontal or perimeter barrier for fire ants. You can [search for permits](#) on the APVMA website.

Insecticides must be used in accordance with the conditions of the permit and in conjunction with the product's label.

Keeping a record

You must keep written records for the storage and chemical treatments of potted plants. The written records must:

- state the chemical product used and the way it was used for the treatment
- outline the steps you have taken to ensure the potted plants are stored correctly, including chemical treatment records.

For further information contact a Biosecurity Queensland inspector on 13 25 23.