



## Article Submitted to Hanai Ai Sustainable Organic Newsletter

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### Little Fire Ant Alert

Over the holidays we received a most unwanted present, and it wasn't a lump of coal. A public report of a suspicious ant at a garden shop on Maui led to the confirmation that little fire ants (LFA; *Wasmannia auropunctata*) colonies were present in hapu`u logs imported from Hawai'i island, for sale in multiple garden shops and nurseries on Oahu and Maui. LFA are tiny orange-red stinging ants that nest in the ground and in plants all the way to the treetops, reach incredibly high numbers, and harm people, pets, agriculture, and native species. LFA have been present on Hawai'i island since 1999 when they were discovered in large numbers in the Puna area. Since then, LFA have been documented to spread to new sites in potted plants, plant materials, cinder, green waste, and nearly anything stored in and moved from infested areas.

It is unknown how long infested logs have been distributed to nurseries and garden shops, to whom they were sold, or even if the ants have also been moved in other materials.

Your help is essential in detecting LFA and reporting infestations to protect the health of families and pets, the agriculture industry and local economy.

Test for your property for LFA:

1. Place chopsticks with a slight smear of peanut butter every few feet in and around plants, yards, gardens, and nurseries (note: using too much peanut butter makes it difficult to identify the ants). They particularly like moist, shady areas, the bottoms of pots, and banana leaf axles.
2. Leave them for about an hour during the day.
3. Check all chopsticks. If the ants you see are black, or fast moving, are more than one color, or some of them have heads that are much larger than their bodies, they probably are not LFA. LFA are VERY small, a uniform orange color, and walk fairly slowly.
4. If you see ants on the chopstick that match this description, drop the stick into a zip-lock bag, place it in the freezer, and call the Hawai'i Department of Agriculture pest hotline at 643-PEST (statewide, toll free number) to make a report and get help. Do not move infested materials or live ants!
5. There is no way to eradicate the ants from the Big Island, so **always** test all new plants and materials for tiny (1/16 inch), slow-moving, orange-red ants.

More information on LFA can be found at <http://www.littlefireants.com/>, and <http://www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/oc/freepubs/pdf/ip-lfa.pdf>.

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