

The control of leaf-cutting ants by drenching

Recognize the problem

Leaf-cutting ants, or bachac, occur in great numbers and can be responsible for destroying an entire crop virtually overnight.

Background

Traditionally, simple barriers and setting of baits with pesticide have been used to control leaf-cutting ants. However, if these methods are impractical because of the size of the field or the use of baits has been found to be inefficient, then drenching is an alternative to these methods. Consideration must be given to the environment, beneficial insects and fishes when choosing an insecticide for drenching and when applying a drench.

Management

- Follow trails of ants and locate their nest at night, when ants are most active
- Use a stick with a piece of cloth attached to the top, or painted to the top to mark the nests
- Purchase appropriate pesticides from a reputable garden shop and ensure the pesticide has not expired
- Use protective gear (rubber boots, nitrile gloves and respirator) when mixing and applying insecticide.
- Pour the recommended quantity of pesticide into a 3 gallon can, then add water to reach the 3 gallon mark. If there is no recommended rate for drenching then use rate recommended for environmental spraying or highest rate recommended for crop protection.
- Firstly, apply mixture around the nest, then drench the nest ensuring complete coverage. Try to direct some of the mixture directly into the holes that form the entry point into the nest.
- On completion, cover the entire area that has been sprayed with plastic or tarpaulin so that the insecticide works more effectively and doesn't come into contact with beneficial insects
- Wash out the spray can thoroughly, making sure that the residue does not go into watercourses that could contain fish
- Store remaining pesticide in a locked cupboard away from foodstuff, children and animals
- Wash clothes and bathe to remove any pesticide residues
- Remove plastic cover after two days

Leaf cutting ants in action. (Photo by Eric Boa)



Crop damage from leaf cutting ants. (Photo by Lizz Johnson)



When using a pesticide, always wear protective clothing and follow the instructions on the product label, such as dosage, timing of application, and pre-harvest interval.

Scientific name(s) > *Atta*, *Acromyrmex*

The recommendations in this factsheet are relevant to: India, People's Republic of China, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, Vietnam



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