



Know Before You Go

Preparing to Visit a National Forest

Fire Ants

Most ants are merely an annoyance while camping, hiking or picnicking. However, the red fire ant poses the most serious risk of any ant in North America because of its aggressive nature and the potency of its sting. Fire ants are dark reddish-brown and only a fraction of an inch in size. A fire ant colony will contain ants of a variety of sizes, whereas most other ants are uniform in size. When attacking, the fire ant stinger injects venom. It is fatal to small animals, and very uncomfortable to humans. It produces a burning sensation like fire. Small red bumps will appear on the skin and be annoyingly itchy. The venom from fire ants can actually be deadly to persons who are sensitive or allergic.



Fire ants can be avoided if you know how to identify them. A fire ant nest might look like a sandy mound, a dome or a bald spot on the soil; but the colony is likely to extend several feet underground. Just because you're a few steps away from a surface mound of loose soil does not mean you're standing at a safe distance from a fire ant nest. Or, the nest might be invisible, hiding under objects like logs or rocks.

Safety Checklist

- Watch out for mounds of loose soil that don't seem to fit in with other surroundings.
- Avoid camping at the base of trees, especially if you notice rotting wood.
- Don't set up tents with floors on top of ant mounds or try to coexist with them in any way.
- Keep your camp site clean.
- Approach ant mounds with caution.
- If you encounter ants, leave them alone and find a new camping site. Don't try to get rid of them.
- If you or someone in your group is sensitive or allergic to fire ants, always bring appropriate medication in case of a serious reaction.

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