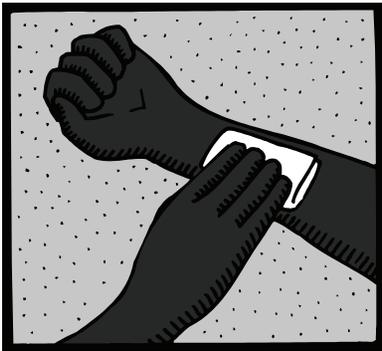


Treating Stings

Sting sites should be treated with an antiseptic to stop any possible infection. Cool compresses can help relieve pain and swelling. Other common home remedies include applying cigarette tobacco, crushed aspirin, or meat tenderizer. These methods are not necessarily endorsed, just recognized. If itching becomes a problem, an anti-itch cream will help. Scratching a sting can open up the skin and allow a secondary infection to get started. If you experience multiple stings or know that you have had systemic or more severe reactions to stings, watch for more serious signs like difficulty in breathing, dizziness, nausea or hives. These symptoms may require immediate medical attention.



Removing Nests

In most hardware / home improvement stores and garden centers wasp traps are available. If you've got hornets or yellowjackets these traps work great. A pheromone is used as bait to lure the insects inside, where they cannot escape. If a large nest is nearby, your trap may be very effective. This does not guarantee that you will eradicate the nest, but may reduce your chances of experiencing a sting. Traps should be placed away from homes and where people will be active. You can build your own trap and bait it with a non pesticide, non pheromone bait. Plans for these traps are widely available on the internet.

Removing Nests

First, you must know which wasps you are dealing with. Hornets and yellowjackets build an enclosed nest. It may be in a tree, the ground or a wall. Paper wasps build an open hexagonal nest often found hanging under roof eaves or in sheds.

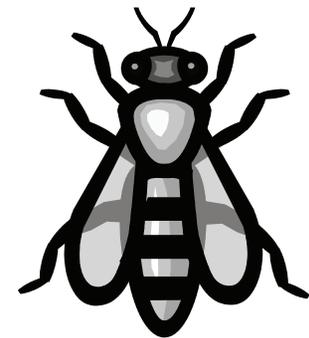
Do not try to destroy a yellowjacket or hornet nest with a pesticide spray. Have you heard the phrase "stirring up a hornets nest"? The response you will get will be painful and extremely dangerous. Also, if the nest is inside a wall of a living space, the dead insects leftover will cause a foul smell. Leave this job to a professional!

If you have paper wasps, there's some good news and some bad news. First the bad news. No effective lure has been developed for paper wasps. So don't go and buy the trap described earlier at your hardware store. The only way to remove paper wasps is by direct chemical treatment. The good news is that you can do this yourself. Be sure to use caution and common sense. Wasps must directly contact an appropriate pesticide or return to a pesticide soaked nest. You can purchase a quick knockdown, aerosol spray for this. Look for a wasp/hornet spray that will shoot 10-20 feet or more. Locating the nest is not always easy. The nest may be a fair distance from where you see wasp activity. Once you have located the nest, *wait until after dark to treat the nest.* It's a good idea to carry a flashlight. After dark the wasps will be much less likely to fly or direct a defensive response at you. Sometimes a paper wasp will build its nest in the small voids of a tile roof or even build in an attic. These situations present a more difficult removal procedure and may require professional help.

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Wasps and Their Painful Stings



Concerns About Wasps

It is the threat of a painful wasp sting that has most people concerned about the presence of wasps or a nearby nest. Only very rarely does a stinging incident occur. Most of the time bees, wasps, yellowjackets and hornets are beneficial to humans and the ecosystem in some way. Even when a few wasps or bees are present it is best to leave them alone. However, there are times that control measures need to be taken.



The Life Cycle

Inside the nest of the social wasp is a complex organization. The queen is at the top of the chain. Her role is to establish a nest in the early spring. Some species build in the ground, some in trees or wall voids and others under eaves and in sheds or woodpiles. At first she must do all the work. Nest building, food gathering, offspring production and care must be accomplished by her alone. The first offspring are produced as a result of the mating that took place the previous autumn. These offspring mature into infertile females and some males. The females relieve the queen of nest building and maintenance, brood care and food gathering. The males mate with the queen, increasing the number of members in her colony. Late in the season, fertile females will be produced. Before overwintering, the fertile females mate with the colony males. As winter weather moves in, these fertilized females leave the nest, looking for shelter in places like woodpiles, sheds, garages, under debris and anyplace they can avoid freezing temperatures, wet rains and blowing winds. They remain largely inactive relying mostly on stored energy to live through the winter. In the spring they begin foraging and looking for a place to build their own nest.

The Problem Wasps

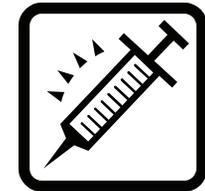
The order Hymenoptera includes the solitary wasps such as the mud dauber, and the social wasps. Social wasps are either scavengers or hunt insect pests. Paper wasps and hornets feed abundantly on armyworms, corn earworms, house flies, blow flies and caterpillars. Yellowjackets are exclusively scavengers.

The social wasps initiate most stinging incidents. Unless they nest or are abundant near human activities, it's best to leave them alone. Unlike the solitary wasps, these wasps can become very defensive when their nests are disturbed. Loud noises such as a lawnmower, vibration from footsteps or just coming too close to a nest can elicit a defensive response. Yellowjackets, hornets and paper wasps are attracted to some types of odors and sources of water. Swimming pools, ornamental ponds and other sources of standing water will be attractive to nest building workers. Foraging and scavenging workers may be attracted in differing degrees to clover, ripe or rotting fruit, pet food, garbage, soft drinks and a variety of cooked meats. Perfumes, hair sprays, suntan lotion and other cosmetics may less frequently attract these insects.

Wasps, yellowjackets and hornets can deliver multiple stings through a lance-like stinger. Victims should quickly brush off these insects and quietly leave the area. When a wasp, yellowjacket or bee stings, an alarm pheromone is released in the venom signaling nearby coworkers to deliver stings to the same area on your body. Reactions to stings vary depending on the number of stings delivered and your body's reaction to the venom in the sting. Normal reactions are characterized by a painful, reddened swollen area that may also itch, but dissipates within 10-60 minutes. More serious local reactions last for days. The pain, swelling and itching will be more intense in the area directly surrounding the sting site. When a person has a severe allergic sensitivity to a sting, a serious or fatal reaction can occur.

Anaphylactic Reactions

The most serious reaction is a systemic allergic reaction known as anaphylaxis. This type of reaction generally occurs rapidly after the sting and affects the whole body. A person may feel dizzy, nauseated and weak, experience stomach cramps and diarrhea. Also coughing, itching around the eyes, hives, wheezing, difficulty breathing or swallowing, vomiting, low blood pressure, shock, unconsciousness, darkened skin and death can occur in highly sensitive people. This can all occur in 5 - 30 minutes. Each time a person has a systemic reaction to a sting, the severity will increase in almost every circumstance. People that know they are extremely allergic to insect stings and bites carry an emergency bee kit with them. Diagnostic testing is recommended for individuals who have experienced systemic reactions to insect stings. If you experience a systemic reaction, even with mild symptoms, you should see your physician.



Sting Desensitization

Desensitization programs have shown success in reducing reactions to insect stings. A series of shots is administered over several years to reduce venom sensitivity. Doctors who are allergy specialists determine the frequency for administering the shots. This process can be an expensive one. Shots will be stopped normally after 3-5 years when allergy testing becomes negative.