

WASPS, HORNETS AND YELLOW-JACKETS

It is important to remember that wasps and hornets are beneficial insects, feeding on a variety of many other less than desirable insects. Unless they pose a real personal health or safety threat, you are largely encouraged to leave them alone, as they play an important role in the ecological balance in the garden.

Several types of wasps and hornets may become household problems when they build their nests near homes and yards. Some wasps build open, honeycomb-like nests under eaves and similar places. Many hornets will build large nests in bushes and trees and cover them with a gray paper-like material, while yellow-jackets prefer building nests in the ground or in cracks and crevices of buildings.

Yellow-jackets can be aggressive and likely to sting when nests are approached, and can become defensive if their nests are accidentally trampled on or when lawns are mowed. Yellow-jacket populations are highest in mid-to late-summer when they can be especially annoying as they scavenge among ripened fruits in the garden.

All of these types of wasps and hornets die off in the winter. If the nest is not noticed until late in the year, no treatment is necessary, as only the Queen will overwinter to start a new nest in a different location the next year. If wasps are nesting in an area where control must be achieved, an aerosol wasp and hornet spray is the easiest method. These sprays will propel the insecticide about 8-10 feet. Most sprays contain oils, so try to minimize plant exposures in the vicinity of the area being treated. Spraying is best done after dark, and a cool evening is better than a warm one. This ensures that the insects are in the nest and less active. If you still see the insects flying after a day or two, repeat the application.

Caulking buildings to eliminate cracks and crevices is also a way to discourage nesting activities. Do not, however, caulk up an active nest without first spraying. The trapped insects may burrow their way directly into the house in their effort to free themselves.

The invasive European paper wasp is now being seen in Southeastern Michigan. These wasps are the same size, or slightly smaller, as our native wasps, and have yellow antennae. An interesting difference in their behavior is that the female wasp will spend the entire winter in the nest. So, in this case, it would be beneficial to remove the nests as they are discovered late in the year. The European paper wasp nests can be as large

as saucers and are usually circular. The nests are found in unusual places such as pipes and supports of street signs - something to be aware of if you are allergic to wasp stings. Although the European wasps are not highly aggressive, they will protect their nests.

The **Master Gardener Hotline** is open from April to October, Monday through Friday. Lines are available 9:00 am to noon and 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm at 888-678-3464

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