

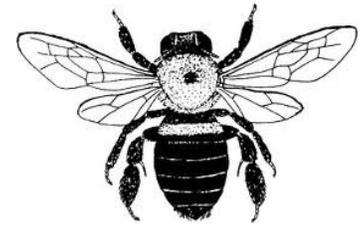
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Carpenter Bees

Injury

Carpenter bees bore into wood to make a home for their young. These bees (in the case of a common species, *Xylocopa virginica*) may drill a large number of one-half inch diameter holes in selected sites. Often the same nesting sites are used year after year, and the tunnels created by the bees' boring are reused.



Damage occurs primarily to fascia boards. Nail holes, exposed saw cuts and unpainted wood are attractive nesting sites to these insects. Porches, garages, shed ceilings and trim, railings, roof overhangs and outdoor wooden furniture are also common nesting sites.

Continued tunneling may weaken wooden structures. Yellow sawdust and the bees' waste materials may stain cars, clothing or furniture.

Description

Carpenter bees closely resemble bumblebees - they are black and yellow, and about one inch long. The bees' mid-section (thorax) is covered with yellowish hairs and their abdomens are shiny black, without hairs.

Males are territorial and often guard potential nest sites in spring. In an attempt to discourage intruders, the male bees hover or dart at any moving thing that ventures into the nesting area. This behavior can create a "human annoyance" factor that often startles and concerns homeowners. Male carpenter bees do not sting. Female carpenter bees, like many other bees, can sting but it is uncommon for them to do so.

Life History

Carpenter bees nest in dry wood, occasionally in hollow stems. They overwinter as juvenile adults in tunnels made the previous year. Those that survive the winter mate in spring (April to June) and then begin nesting activities. They prefer to refurbish old tunnels rather than create new ones. These tunnels may be a foot or more in length and contain many cells, where females lay their eggs. In each cell, a female places nectar and pollen she has gathered from flowers as provisions for her young. The larvae develop in approximately four to six weeks, then pass through their pupal (or resting) stage as they transform into adults. These emerge in early fall, before cold weather sets in.

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Management

Carpenter bees are pollinators and therefore considered beneficial. If they are not in a place where they are bothering anyone, they may be left alone. The majority of the bees' tunneling damage is just to fascia boards. Some people remove boards with these bees in them, place them in an out of the way spot, and then replace the damaged wood with new boards. New boards should be painted or finished promptly to discourage carpenter bees from taking up residence.

Although beneficial as pollinators, carpenter bees may be considered structural pests when they nest in wood of our homes and buildings. Once nesting sites are established they tend to return year after year. Screening may help deter them from the structure.

Rough-cut untreated wood is preferred for nesting. Well-painted finished structures are a deterrent to carpenter bees. Sometimes, however, the bees persist and treatment of the tunnels with an insecticide may be warranted. Sealing tunnels after treatment is recommended. Insecticide application is usually best done before nesting activity gets underway (in late spring or early summer in most years). Treat when the bees are first seen early in the spring.

Some commercial wasp and hornet sprays list carpenter bees on the label, and are effective and easy to use. Insecticide should be applied after dark on a cool evening (when the bees are less active) to the tunnel entrances and along exposed surfaces. If necessary, you may use a commercial wasp and hornet spray to kill the bees, and treat the nest holes in the wood with bifenthrin, carbaryl, deltamethrin, lambda-cyhalothrin, permethrin, or tetramethrin (with other ingredients). Nest hole openings can be sealed with small pieces of stainless steel wool, wood filler, or putty, after a spray application. A few days after application, if no activity is observed, the holes should be plugged deeply with putty or caulking compound. If the tunnels are plugged without first killing the insects, carpenter bees trapped inside will bore new openings.

Sources: Carolyn Klass, Senior Extension Associate, Department of Entomology, Cornell University and Edgar M. Raffensperger, Professor, Department of Entomology, Cornell University, 6/72. Revised 5/03. http://ipmguidelines.org/Home/content/Book2/CH07/default.asp#_Toc235346509 2012.

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