



Cornell University
Cooperative Extension
Rockland County

10 Patriot Hills Drive
Stony Point, NY 10980
Phone: (845) 429 - 7085
Fax: (845) 429 - 8667
www.rocklandcce.org

Social Wasps Hornets and Yellow Jackets

Living Habits

Yellow jackets are representative of social wasps that live in large cooperative groups. They may nest in the ground, lower branches of shrubs, hollow logs, stumps or wall voids of buildings. Social wasps have a caste system with a queen, male drones and sterile female workers.



The queen is the only individual to survive the winter; usually she takes cover in decaying logs or similar locations. In early spring she emerges to start a nest. Old nests are not reused. The new nest grows as her eggs hatch and workers are produced – by the end of summer a nest may contain several thousand adults

Social wasps are beneficial insects when they feed on plant pests such as flies and harmful caterpillars. They also help to pollinate plants when they feed on flower nectar. While all social wasps will vigorously defend their nests from intruders, yellow jackets tend to be more aggressive than other wasps, especially in late summer. Weather also affects the “temper” of these insects. On windy, humid or cloudy days when they are less able to forage for food, they are more apt to sting. Unlike honey bees, wasps can sting repeatedly.

As scavengers, wasps pick up bits of food from picnic areas or trash cans. “Picnic” yellow jacket workers that scavenge for food may be a serious hazard to people eating outside. These wasps are strongly attracted to sweet liquids such as soda and often enter cans. They can inflict a painful sting and are dangerous to people who have developed an allergy to the venom. Inspect food before eating it and keep all liquids in open containers where wasps would be visible.

Management

Outdoors

Check the outside of structures periodically during early summer and remove small nests. By August and September, wasp populations will be highest. If possible, wait until frost kills the insects. Once the insects are no longer active you may remove the nest.

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If you must remove an active nest, you may use commercially available wasp and hornet sprays. Active ingredients include mint oil, clove oil, bifenthrin, carbaryl, cyfluthrin, cypermethrin + prallethrin, deltamethrin, lambda-cyhalothrin, permethrin, or tetramethrin (with other ingredients). Spray directly into the nest opening(s), preferably at dusk or night when the temperature is cool.

Wear protective clothing: long sleeves, trousers tucked into socks, gloves, and a beekeeper's hat or mosquito netting draped over a wide-brimmed hat and fastened to protect the face and neck from stings.

Two applications are often necessary for treatment of wasp nests; some insecticides that work by contact do not affect wasps that have not yet emerged as adults. A second spraying may be done a few days to a week after the first, if there are any signs of activity. If no activity is observed, the area may be considered safe.

Consider hiring a professional to treat nests in wall voids, since spraying into the wasps' outdoor entrance may drive them indoors. Seal any holes or cracks around the outside of the home to prevent wasps from nesting in wall voids or other spots where they may gain entry into the building.

Source: <http://ipmguidelines.org/Home/content/Book2/CH07/default.asp>

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The information on pest management for New York State contained in this publication is dated September 2010. The user is responsible for obtaining the most up-to-date pest management information. Contact any Cornell Cooperative Extension county office or PMEP (<http://pmep.cce.cornell.edu/>), the Cornell Cooperative Extension pesticide information website. The information herein is no substitute for pesticide labeling. The user is solely responsible for reading and following manufacturer's labeling and instructions.