

NEWS RELEASE
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WASPS, YELLOWJACKETS, AND MEAT BEES

BACKYARD HORTICULTURE

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During parts of the year in Mariposa, wasps and related species can become a nuisance during outdoor activities. A University of California leaflet, No.7450, has a good discussion on their biology and control and is available free from the UCCE Mariposa office.

Some wasps are predators for most or all of the year and provide a great benefit by killing large numbers of plant-feeding insects and nuisance flies; others are exclusively scavengers. Wasps become a problem only when they threaten to sting humans. One of the most troublesome of the social wasps is the yellow jacket. Yellow jackets, especially ground- and cavity-nesting ones such as the western yellow jacket, tend to defend their nests vigorously when disturbed. In fall, foraging yellow jackets are primarily scavengers and they start to show up at picnics, barbecues, around garbage cans, at dishes of dog or cat food placed outside, and where ripe or overripe fruit are accessible.

LIFE CYCLE

Nests of both yellow jacket and paper wasps typically are begun in spring by a single queen who over winters and becomes active when the weather warms. In the spring the larvae require large amounts of protein. By late summer, however, the

colonies require large amounts of sugar to maintain the queen and workers. So foraging wasps are particularly interested in sweet things at this time. Normally, yellow jacket colonies only live one season.

Yellow jackets

The term yellow jacket refers to a number of different species of wasps including the ground-nesting species, the western yellow jacket, which is the most commonly encountered species and is sometimes called the "meat bee." Nests are commonly built in rodent burrows. If the rodent hole is not spacious enough, yellow jackets will increase the size by moistening the soil and digging. Aerial-nesting yellow jackets build paper nests that are attached to the eaves of a building or are hanging from the limb of a tree. These aerial nesters are extremely defensive when their nests are disturbed. Wasp stingers have no barbs and can be used repeatedly, especially when the wasp gets inside clothing.

Mud Daubers

Mud daubers are black and yellow, thread-waisted, solitary wasps that build a hard mud nest, usually on ceilings and walls, attended by a single female wasp. They do not defend their nests and rarely sting. During winter, you can safely remove the nests without spraying.

MANAGEMENT

Most social wasps are beneficial by eliminating large numbers of other pest insects through predation. Scavenging wasps will not usually become a problem if there is no food around to attract them. When nuisance wasps are present in the outdoor environment, keep foods (including pet food) and drinks covered or inside the house and keep garbage in tightly sealed garbage cans. Once wasps discover food, they will continue to hunt around that location long after the source has been removed.

If wasp nests must be eliminated, it is easiest and safest to call for professional help. If a rapid solution to a severe yellow jacket problem is essential, seek the assistance of a professional pest control operator who can use microencapsulated baits to control these pests. Do-it-yourself options include trapping wasps in a baited trap designed for that purpose, early-season removal of nests, or spraying the nest or nesting site with an insecticide labeled for that use.

Trapping Wasps

There are two types of wasp traps, lure and water traps.

Lure Traps are available at many retail stores that sell pest control supplies and are easiest to use. Lure traps contain a chemical that attracts yellow jackets into the traps, but common lures such as heptyl butyrate are not equally attractive to all species. Proteins such as lunchmeat can be added as an attractant and are believed to improve catches. Change the chemical bait every few weeks; change more frequently when temperatures are high. Meats must be replaced more frequently because yellow jackets are not

attracted to rotting meat. Also, periodically check the trap to remove trapped yellow jackets.

Water Traps: Water traps are generally homemade and consist of a 5-gallon bucket, string, and protein bait (turkey, ham, fish, or liver works well; do not use cat food because it may repel the yellow jackets after a few days). The bucket is filled with soapy water and the protein bait is suspended 1 to 2 inches above the water (the use of a wide mesh screen over the bucket will help prevent other animals from reaching and consuming the bait). After the yellow jacket removes the protein, it flies down and becomes trapped in the water and drowns. Place these traps away from patio or picnic areas so wasps aren't attracted to your food as well.

Nest Sprays

Aerosol formulations of insecticides on the market labeled for use on wasp and hornet nests can be effective against both yellow jackets and paper wasps, but they must be used with extreme caution. Wasps will attack applicators when sensing a poison applied to their nests, and even the freeze-type products are not guaranteed to stop all wasps that come flying out. It is prudent to wear protective clothing that covers the whole body, including gloves and a veil over the face. Wasps are most likely to be in the nest at night.

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