

Know Your Bees

A guide to stinging insects and how to spot the difference

Bumblebees



Pest: Bumblebees are between 1/4 - 1 inch in size, have black and yellow markings, and an overall fuzzy appearance.
Nest: Bumblebees build their nests out of pollen clumps, usually in the ground or a dense grass clump, and often in an abandoned mouse nest.
Threat: Bumblebees are considered a beneficial insect because they pollinate flowers. However, they can sting. If a nest is located in or near a structure, then control is necessary.

Carpenter Bees



Pest: Carpenter bees are between half an inch and one inch in size. They resemble bumblebees, but the top of their abdomen is largely bare and shiny.
Nest: Carpenter bees do not live in nests or colonies. They bore into wood, where they make galleries for rearing their young. Carpenter bees tend to prefer decaying or weathered wood to new or painted wood.
Threat: Carpenter bees are a serious property threat, and can cause structural damage over time if they are not eliminated. Male carpenter bees can be territorial and may hover in front of one's face aggressively, but they have no stinger and these actions are merely for show. Female carpenter bees do have a potent sting, which is rarely used.

Honey Bees



Pest: Honeybees are between 1/2-5/8 inch in size and orangish brown or black in color.
Nest: Honeybees are social insects and live as colonies in hives, with mature colonies of 20,000-80,000 individuals.
Threat: Honeybees are not aggressive and do not search for something to attack. Instead, they are defensive and will attack only whatever seems to threaten the colony.

Bald-faced Hornet



Pest: Bald-faced hornets are largely black in color, with a mostly white face.
Nest: Bald-faced hornets build aerial nests out of paper carton. The nests are usually in exposed locations, often on trees, utility poles, overhangs or other structures. The nests can be quite large, growing to 14 inches in diameter and 24 inches in length.
Threat: Bald-faced hornets are considered beneficial insects because they control many pest insect species. However, if their nest is located near a structure, control is warranted.

Mud Daubers



Pest: Mud daubers are long and slender, usually black in color, and may have pale markings or a metallic luster.
Nest: Mud daubers are solitary wasps and do not live in colonies. Females construct nests of mud. Many short mud tubes, usually about 1 inch long, are constructed side by side. They frequently build nests under eaves, porch ceilings, in garages and sheds, barns, protected building walls and attics.
Threat: Mud daubers are considered beneficial insects because they control spiders. However, if their nest is located near human activity, control is warranted.

Paper Wasp



Pest: The paper wasp, a type of wasp species, is brownish in color with yellow or reddish markings.
Nest: Paper wasps get their name from the paper-like material of which they construct their nest. Paper wasp nests are often umbrella-like in shape and are never enclosed in an envelope. Nests are often found hanging from twigs and branches of trees and shrubs, as well as porch ceilings, door frames, eaves, deck floor joints, railings, etc.
Threat: If a nest is touched, there is a high probability you will get stung, although paper wasps are typically not an aggressive type of wasp.

Yellowjacket



Pest: Yellowjackets have a yellow and black color pattern and are between 3/8 - 5/8 inches.
Nest: Yellowjackets live in nests constructed of paper carton, which can grow to be basketball-sized. One nest will contain a number of rounded paper combs, attached one below another and covered with a many-layered envelope. Depending on the species, the nest may be in the ground such as around plant roots, logs or timber, or aerial and attached to shrubs, bushes, houses, garages or sheds.
Threat: Yellowjackets are slow to sting, unless their nests are threatened. Yellowjackets are considered beneficial insects because they control many pest insect species. However, if their nest is located near a structure, control is warranted.

Images and facts courtesy National Pest Management Association/Tom Myers (PestWorld.org)