



Pest Corner

September, 2006

Yellowjackets

Compromise and Beware

These could be beneficial, but can become aggressive and dangerous in late summer. A few people (1-2 percent) are severely allergic to their venom and a sting may be life threatening.

Yellow jackets are heavy bodied wasps, black with yellow or white markings. They live in gray, papery nests located either below ground or suspended above ground. Hunting workers search for other insects or rotting fruit. Workers are attracted to any meat-based or sugary item. Food is carried back to the nest where it is fed to nest mates. Stings usually occur through accidental contact with the nest or nest entrance. Workers vigorously defend the nest and queen against intruders.

The nest is run by a queen whose sole responsibility is to lay eggs. The queen begins a nest in the spring by laying a few eggs and raising these workers to adults. At this point, the queen may no longer leave the nest to hunt. Workers provision, expand and defend the nest all season long. As spring and summer pass, the nest grows as new workers are reared and assume their roles. By the end of summer, nests may contain hundred or even thousands of workers. It is at this time of the year that they are the most troublesome and dangerous.

By fall, the nest also has produced a crop of new queens and male yellow jackets (drones). By the time of the first frost, most workers and male wasps have died and only new, fertilized queens remain. New queens leave the nest to find a protected spot to over-winter and re-start the cycle in the spring.

It might be necessary to occasionally destroy a yellow jacket nest because it is near human activity. The nest should be sprayed at night with an aerosol insecticide. Spraying at night helps because the workers are inside and relatively calm. Use one of the aerosols that will propel a stream of insecticide up to 20 feet so that you can stand off at a safe distance and spray directly into the nest opening. These sprays are sold as Bee And Wasp Killer or something similar. Do not pour gasoline or paint thinner into nests. This is dangerous, environmentally harmful, and illegal. Use products specifically made for yellow jacket control.

Ground-dwelling yellowjackets are primarily nuisance pests in lawns. They do no damage to the grass, but may build nests in or near lawn areas.

Non-chemical Management

If possible, tolerate nests without disturbing them. The nests persist for only one season. Do not make food available to attract them. Keep garbage and compost heaps covered and feed pets indoors.

Use yellowjacket traps baited with meat or fish to reduce numbers in problem areas. Do not place traps near areas of human/pet activity.

Pesticide Guidelines

Apply any pesticides following label instructions. To prevent injuries, use treatments late in the evening when yellowjackets have returned to their nest. If allergic to stings, consider contacting a pest control company to control yellowjackets. Remove weed flowers in the area of lawn to be treated before applying. Avoid Sevin if there is any possibility of spray drifting onto nearby blooming plants. Products are toxic to bees. Apply only to the nest hole.

- ◆ Advanced Garden Power Force Multi-Insect Killer RT-S.
- ◆ Bonide Total Pest Control Conc.
- ◆ ferti-lome Liquid Carbaryl Garden Spray.
- ◆ Sevin Brand RP2 Home & Garden Carbaryl Insecticide.

This list may not include all products registered for this use.