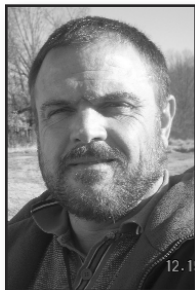


It's That Time Of Year Again, Wasps Are Moving Indoors



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Leaves are losing their green chlorophyll pigments, and their base colors are being revealed. There is a nip in the air as the warm summer temperatures give way to the cold winter season. As the leaves fall, and the fur grows thicker, wasps are

preparing for winter as well.

There are many different wasp species. Many are important parasitoids of other insect pests. Most wasps are solitary insects. However, there are several social species that cause concern because they protect their communal nests by stinging those that venture too close.

Paper wasps are an insect group that most people can recognize at a glance. However, they shouldn't be confused with yellow jackets and hornets, whose stinging ability is similar, but their nesting habits differ. Paper wasps build open-faced, hexagonal-celled nests made of paper. Yellow jackets and hornets also use paper, but their nests are not open faced. The paper or carton that is used to construct the nests is made by scraping fibers from wood and/or plant fibers, mixing it with saliva and forming it with their jaws into the nest.

Nests typically consist of three forms or castes: worker wasps, queens and males. Queens and workers are essentially indistinguishable from one another. Males, while they look menacing, are unable to sting since the stinger is a modification of the egg-laying apparatus. In late summer, queens stop laying eggs and the colony soon declines. As winter ap-

proaches, mated female offspring of the queen seek overwintering sites, while the rest of the colony dies.

This mated female searches for protected cracks and crevices in structures or under tree bark. There she will wait for the warmer days of spring, and then emerge and start next year's wasp colony. Sometimes, she finds her way inside our houses; and while she is not being protective, she can deliver a painful sting to the inhabitants. Unlike the honey bee, a wasp can sting multiple times.

Overwintering wasps enter a type of hibernation or diapause. However, they can "wake up" on a warm winter day and begin to fly about. While they are sluggish and frequently appear dead, a hibernating wasp can deliver a sting at any time.

To help break down the sting's poisons and reduce pain, apply a soft moist mixture (poultice) of baking soda, meat tenderizer and water to the wound. Antihistamines such as Benadryl® can be helpful to lessen swelling in mildly allergic reactions.

Severe reactions can result in hives and itching throughout the body, nausea, vomiting, asthma, dizziness, confusion, slurred speech, blood pressure drop, unconsciousness or even death. These complications in allergic individuals may happen within minutes of a sting, with most reported deaths occurring within one hour. Individuals who experience these types of allergic reactions should immediately seek medical attention. Δ

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