

# "Bug of the Month"

In the western states there are two distinct types of social wasps, yellowjackets and paper wasps. By far the most bothersome is the yellowjackets. It is generally at the end of the summer (August – September) when nests may contain hundreds of workers that they are the most troublesome and dangerous.

**WHAT DO THEY LOOK LIKE?** The term yellowjacket refers to a number of different species of wasps in the genera *Vespa* and *Dolichovespula* (family Vespidae). Yellowjackets are heavy-bodied wasps, black with yellow or white markings. They live in grey, papery, nests located either below ground, or suspended above ground. Immature yellowjackets are white, grublike larvae that become white pupae.



**WHAT DO THEY DO?** Nests of the yellowjackets are begun in the spring by a single queen who overwinters. Upon emerging the queen feeds and searches for a nesting site. From spring to mid-summer, the nests are in the growing phase. The larvae require



large amounts of protein which the workers get mostly in the form of other insects. By late summer, the colony's growth slows and foraging focuses more on sugars than on protein. In ground nests are usually built in rodent burrows, but other protected cavities, like voids in walls and ceilings of houses are sometimes used. Aerial nesting yellowjackets build paper nests that are attached to the eaves of a building or are hanging from the limb of a tree. The entrance is normally a hole at the bottom of the nest. At the end of the season, new queens and males are produced that leave the colony and mate. The workers, males and old queen of the colony dies by the first frost and the old nest is not reused.

Yellowjackets are defensive and usually will not attack unless provoked. The stinger is not barbed like the honey bees, so the yellowjacket can sting more than once. Stinging behavior is most often encountered at the nesting site, although scavenging yellowjackets sometimes will sting if someone tries to swat them away from a potential food source.

**MANAGEMENT.** Avoidance is the best method to prevent encounters with yellowjackets.

- Keep food (including pet food) and drinks covered or inside the house and keep garbage in tightly sealed containers. Once food is discovered, yellowjackets will continue to hunt around that location long after the source has been removed.
- Nest elimination, if necessary is best done by professional pest management personnel.
- Do-it-yourself options include trapping wasps with 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.
  - Lure traps work best as queen traps in late winter and spring.
  - Baited lure traps should have the chemical bait changed every 6 to 8 weeks,
  - Water traps can be constructed with a 5-gallon bucket, string and a protein source such as: turkey, ham, fish, or liver. The bucket is filled with soapy water and the protein bait is suspended 1 to 2 inches above the water. After the yellowjacket removes some of the bait, it flies down and becomes trapped in the soapy water.
  - Great care must be taken when using insecticides. Yellowjackets will attack applicators when they sense a poison being applied to their nest. Protective clothing, gloves, veil over face, protective eyewear, and a respirator should be worn. **Follow ALL of the label directions.**

**MORE QUESTIONS?** Please do not hesitate to give your "Bug Docs" a call at comm.: (360) 315-4450, DSN: 322-4450 or you can e-mail us at [ndveccmei@pnw.med.navy.mil](mailto:ndveccmei@pnw.med.navy.mil).