

Healthy Choices to Control Lawn and Garden Pests

YELLOW JACKETS

What Do They Look Like?

- Shiny, yellow and black-striped wasps, about 2 cm long
- They have 4 wings, unlike the beneficial wasp look-alike, the syrphid fly or flower fly, which has only 2 wings
- Wasps are beneficial predators of aphids, flies, caterpillars and other pests



Where Do I Find Them?

- Yellow jackets love to feed on the juices of ripe fruits and on flower nectar. They are often found in backyards with fruit trees, flowering plants and compost piles
- They are common picnic pests as they are attracted to sugary drinks, fruit and meat

Yellow Jacket Life Cycle

- In the spring, yellow jacket queens build their papery nests in the ground, in holes in walls or under branches or eavestroughs
- Yellow jackets expand their nests all summer as their numbers increase
- In September, all wasps die off, except for the queen
- The queen overwinters in leaf litter or under bark mulch but the old nest is not re-used the following year

What Does The Damage Look Like?

- Stings are painful and can be a concern for people with allergies to insect venom
- Yellow jackets can sometimes damage buildings by chewing through wood walls

Are Yellow Jackets Really A Problem?

- Yellow jackets are beneficial insects. Control them only if they become a significant nuisance or if you are allergic to their stings

What Can I Do? Non-Pesticide Treatments

- Remove wasp attractants, such as over-ripe or rotting fruit
- Prune back flowering plants near doorways and sidewalks to avoid brushing against feeding wasps
- Pick fruit early in the morning or at night when wasps are less active
- Feed pets indoors and keep garbage can lids tightly closed
- Keep picnic foods and drinks covered. Drink from straws
- Re-useable baited wasp traps are sold at garden centres; Bait traps with meat scraps before August; use honey, jam or fruit later in the summer
- Only remove nests from areas that are frequently used by people. It is not necessary to get rid of nests located away from “high traffic” areas
- If you can tolerate a nest until the end of the season, the yellow jackets won’t be back as they don’t re-use their nests

- If you must remove a nest, do it early in the summer when nests are small, and in the evening when wasps are less active
- Removing a nest:
- Before taking action, consult with a garden care professional
- Wear protective clothing, such as a hat, safety glasses, long-sleeved shirt, pants and gloves. Make sure you are covered from head to toe!
- Use a long pole or broom to knock the wasp nest to the ground. Try to knock it away from doorways or other frequently used parts of your home or garden
- Once the nest is on the ground, wait until the wasp activity dies down, then dispose of the nest in household garbage
- You may wish to consider hiring a professional if a nest is large or in a difficult to reach location. Make sure the company does not use chemical pesticides to remove wasps!

How Can I Prevent It Next Year?

- Yellow jackets do not use the same nest twice.
- As mentioned above, if you can tolerate the nest for one season, chances are the wasps will not be back next year
- Remove wasp attractants from around your yard and garden (see above)

Tips For A Healthy Garden

- Ensure soil is healthy well conditioned with organic compost and has adequate drainage (remember that plants get most of their nutrients from the soil)
- Plan your garden so plants are put in areas where they naturally thrive (dry or wet sun or shade)
- Plant in raised beds (good for the plants good for the back!)
- Use native plants that are already acclimatized require low maintenance and have an in-bred resistance to local pests and diseases
- Water deeply but infrequently to maintain a strong root structure
- Protect and attract native beneficial species (give them a place to live and a source of water and they'll do the rest)
- Practise annual crop rotation for each type of vegetable (keeps patterns of disease or insect invasion in check)
- Fertilize regularly in spring and fall with organic compost

