



## CONTROLLING

# YELLOWJACKETS

## AROUND YOUR HOME

**W**ith their potent sting, yellowjackets can be menacing creatures—especially when it comes to a showdown over the picnic table. In years when the spring is warm and dry, yellowjacket populations can increase to the point of making outdoor activities difficult. But, few people are aware that yellowjackets are beneficial as voracious predators of insect pests such as caterpillars and flies.

Due to allergies great caution should be used in dealing with any stinging insect, some people have died from being stung. Because of the danger of multiple stings, we recommend calling your local vector control district, county extension educator, or a private company for information and assistance.

### IDENTIFICATION AND DETECTION

Yellowjackets are a type of wasp that are often mistaken for bees. Sometimes they are confused with other less aggressive predatory wasps, especially paper wasps. Yellowjackets are relatively short and stout compared to paper wasps. Paper wasps have longer more slender bodies and long dangling legs. Some yellowjacket nests are spherical and are enclosed in a papery envelope with a small entrance hole at the bottom. Paper wasp nests are usually suspended from eaves or porch ceilings and look like tiny umbrellas filled with hexagonal cells. Hornet

nests are usually the large paper nests that are observed 20 to 30 feet in the air in established larger trees. Hornets are usually black with green or yellow on their heads and are similar to yellowjackets in many senses but are predators of yellowjacket populations. Hornets also defend their nests with a very aggressive response to threats.

Honeybees may be observed as they will swarm, usually around the first of June, and are relatively harmless at this time. If the swarm is left alone they will move to a new location in about two days. Contact a local bee keeper if you want to remove a swarm.

### LESS-TOXIC CONTROLS

#### *Removing An Individual Yellowjacket from Inside the House*

If you are not hypersensitive to yellowjacket stings:

- don't aggravate the yellowjacket by swatting at it, they react very defensively to swift movements,
- wait until it lands on a flat surface,
- place a glass or plastic container over the insect,
- slide a stiff piece of paper under the opening of the container, and
- seal the container and place it in the freezer overnight to kill the yellowjacket or take it outside and release the insect.
- small numbers of yellow jackets may be removed by physical controls such as a fly swatter used

when they have landed or even a vacuum cleaner to remove the occasional dwelling invader.

If you are finding many yellowjackets inside or routinely finding small numbers of them, you may have a hole in a screen or a nest in a wall void.

#### *Destroying Nests*

Yellowjackets are best managed by removing the nesting site. A nesting site can be found by following the yellowjackets back to their nests. Once the location of the nest is known control options can be considered.

Yellowjackets build nests in abandoned rodent burrows and other holes in the ground, in attics, in wall voids, under slab poured steps and in shrubs and trees. Sometimes they hang their nests from eaves.

If these nests are in high traffic areas they should be managed to prevent stings to individuals that frequent the area.

#### *Trapping Yellowjackets*

Traps can provide temporary relief from yellowjackets; however individual yellowjackets can sometimes escape traps. There are a number of traps on the market, some disposable and others reusable. Experiment to find the trap or traps that work best for you.

- Follow label directions for setting traps, disposing of trapped yellowjackets, and cleaning and reusing



Choose less-toxic pest controls for your home and garden.

- traps that are reusable.
- Place a number of the traps around the periphery of your yard or picnic area to lure the yellowjackets away from your activities and food.
- Set the traps out a few hours before bringing food outdoors so the insects change their foraging patterns.
- If one of the traps is not attracting yellowjackets, move it. If you set out several traps and none of them are attracting yellowjackets even though they are present, try changing the bait. Use baits such as tuna-flavored cat food in the spring and early summer. Try using grenadine or the attractants that come with the traps in late summer and fall.
- Remember that any device that uses an attractant will draw additional insects into an area; place these devices in an area that is well away from the area which you desire to be pest free.

## THINGS TO AVOID AND WHY

*These considerations will reduce the potential indiscriminate use of chemical control products and therefore reduce the potential exposure of pesticide residues to humans, animals and the environment.*

- Use of pesticide products without:
  - knowing what pest you are trying to control,
  - consideration of alternative control options (IPM),
  - selecting the most appropriate product for your situation, and
  - reading and following the label directions.
- Automated aerosols and plant feeders: These devices may disperse chemicals in a way that can increase the risks of exposure to unintentional targets.
- Careless use of ground sterilants: These can leach; either use great care or alternative control methods to prevent damage to desired plants or water contamination.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Central Contra Costa Sanitary District originally developed this Integrated Pest Management (IPM) outreach program for California. The Partners for Clean Water, with assistance from the Idaho Department of Agriculture and the University of Idaho Cooperative Extension, modified the information for Idaho.

## Chemical Controls

As a last resort in years when yellowjacket populations are extremely high, chemical control may be necessary. If you hire a professional applicator you can check an applicator's license status on the Idaho State Department of Agriculture's web page listed below or call 208-332-8600 and ask for license verification.

## PREVENTION

- Seal holes and cracks in foundations, walls, roofs, and eaves to prevent yellowjackets from entering your home.
- Cover attic and crawl space vents with fine mesh insect screen.
- Yellowjackets scavenge for meat (or other protein sources) sweet foods, and sweet drinks in outdoor garbage and recycling bins. Clean recyclables before storing them. Keep garbage cans clean and tightly covered, or seal all food garbage in plastic bags.
- Take down old empty nests in the spring to prevent, or reduce, the re-establishment of nests in these areas.

## WATER POLLUTION

Common household pesticides (a term which includes all chemical control such as herbicides, insecticides, rodenticides, etc.) can make their way into treated wastewater and local waterways, and may be at levels that can harm sensitive aquatic life. Pesticides can also get into ground water which may be used as drinking water. Water pollution prevention agencies have teamed up with participating retail stores, and professional pest control associations to reduce the risks associated with improper pesticide use.

Use pesticides according to label directions, paying close attention to surface and ground water advisories. Dispose of unwanted or leftover pesticides at a household hazardous waste collection facility or event; or through the Idaho State Department of Agriculture (ISDA) Pesticide Disposal Program (PDP). Clean, plastic pesticide and fertilizer containers may also be recycled through ISDA's Container Recycling Operation Program (CROP). Please call 208-465-8442 or visit: [www.agri.idaho.gov](http://www.agri.idaho.gov) for more information. For additional information on pesticide disposal, call 1-800-CLEANUP or visit: [www.1800CLEANUP.org](http://www.1800CLEANUP.org).

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Active ingredients are listed on the front of the product. Pesticide information profiles can be found on the Oregon State University hosted webpage <http://extoxnet.orst.edu/pips>. The University of Idaho's Extension Educators, located in most counties, can often assist in local pest management questions. No endorsement of specific brand name products is intended, nor is criticism implied of similar products that are not mentioned.

For more information, contact:

### Partners for Clean Water

[www.PartnersForCleanWater.org](http://www.PartnersForCleanWater.org)

### Idaho State Department of Agriculture

[www.agri.state.id.us/](http://www.agri.state.id.us/)

### University of Idaho IPM website:

[www.extension.uidaho.edu/](http://www.extension.uidaho.edu/)

### University of Idaho Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners in your area

[www.extension.uidaho.edu/idahogardens/](http://www.extension.uidaho.edu/idahogardens/)

### Western Integrated Pest Management Center

[www.wripmc.org/](http://www.wripmc.org/)

### IPM Institute of North America

[www.ipminstitute.org/](http://www.ipminstitute.org/)

### National Pest Management Association

[www.PestWorld.org](http://www.PestWorld.org)

