



# INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT: YELLOWJACKETS

Yellowjackets are wasps that are sometimes called hornets or “meat bees,” although they aren’t bees at all. Yellowjackets are important in nature because they eat large numbers of caterpillars, house flies and other pest insects.

## When are yellowjackets a problem?

Yellowjackets are problematic for children and adults when they search for food or defend their nests. Yellowjackets can be persistent and aggressive when searching for food, and are more likely to sting when swatted or when their nest is disturbed. If their nest is threatened, yellowjackets will defend it vigorously, and can sting repeatedly, unlike honey bees which sting only once.

### If a child is stung by a yellowjacket:

- ▶ Move the child to a safe area to avoid more stings.
- ▶ Watch for allergic reactions to yellowjacket stings which can develop anywhere on the body. Life-threatening allergic responses require immediate emergency care.
- ▶ Pain is a common reaction to a sting that ranges from short-term, intense feelings of pain to swelling and tenderness with some itching.
- ▶ Other reactions to the sting may include hives, swelling, nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramps and headaches.
- ▶ Symptoms can occur immediately after a sting, or may take longer to appear. They can last for several hours.
- ▶ To treat a sting:
  - ▷ Wash with soap and water.
  - ▷ Apply ice to the area immediately to reduce the pain and swelling.
  - ▷ Apply a baking soda–water paste to reduce itchiness.
  - ▷ Call 911 if the person shows signs of a severe allergic reaction such as difficulty breathing or dizziness.

Unlike honey bees, yellowjackets rarely leave a stinger embedded in the skin.

## Characteristics and habits

Yellowjackets are yellow and black. Yellowjacket nests:

- ▶ look like papery gray balls.
- ▶ are commonly built in holes in the ground, like rodent burrows.
- ▶ may be attached to eaves of buildings, undersides of decks, or tree branches.
- ▶ may be in empty spaces in walls or ceilings of buildings.
- ▶ are started in the spring by the queen.

From spring to midsummer, young yellowjackets are growing in the nest, and many of the new adults are out foraging for insect prey. By late summer, yellowjackets have switched from insect protein to become sugar-craving adults. They scavenge for sweet food around garbage cans, outdoor eating areas and where ripe or overripe fruit is present. In mild climate areas of California, some yellowjacket colonies survive for several years and become quite large.

## IPM strategies

### 1 ELIMINATE NESTING SITES

- ▶ Plug up rodent burrows.
- ▶ Seal holes and cracks in foundations, walls, roofs and eaves.

### 2 REMOVE YELLOWJACKETS’ FOOD

- ▶ Remove attractive foods such as sugary drinks, ripe fruit, meat, pet food or garbage. Keep food covered and indoors. Once food is discovered, yellowjackets will continue to hunt around the area even after the food is removed.
- ▶ Use liners in garbage cans.
- ▶ Use garbage cans with domed-topped, spring-hinged lids (these are wasp-proof) in outdoor eating areas.
- ▶ Empty garbage daily and replace liners.
- ▶ Tightly cover recycling bins and clean daily.



[IPM strategies continued]

**3 GET RID OF YELLOWJACKETS**

Traps can reduce yellowjackets, but won't eliminate them if other food sources are available. Trapping needs to start in the spring and continue into summer and fall. Place traps at least 20 feet away from children and staff to avoid attracting yellowjackets to eating and play areas.

- ▶ **Lure traps** can be purchased and are easy to use. They work best as queen traps in late winter and early spring. In spring there is a 30–45 day period when new queens first emerge before they build nests. Each queen trapped at this time represents one less nest of 500–5,000 yellowjackets in the summer and fall. Lure traps contain a chemical bait. Meat can be added to the lure traps to improve trapping. ▶
- ▶ **Change chemical bait in lure traps every 6 to 8 weeks in spring and every 2 to 4 weeks in summer.**
- ▶ **Change bait more frequently when temperatures are high.**

- ▶ **Meat baits must be replaced more frequently because yellowjackets are not attracted to rotting meat.**
- ▶ **Periodically check the trap to remove trapped yellowjackets and make sure yellowjackets are still attracted to the trap.**

**4 REMOVE YELLOWJACKETS' NEST**

If the yellowjacket population persists after trapping and removing attractive food, it may be necessary to locate and treat the nest. Call for professional help to treat a yellowjacket nest. In some areas, the Mosquito and Vector Control District may be available to treat nests. To find out, call the California Mosquito and Vector Control Association at (916) 440-0826. If this service is not available, call a pest management professional (PMP).

**ACTION PLAN FOR YELLOWJACKETS**

WHEN TO TAKE ACTION	NONPESTICIDE PRACTICES	LAST RESORT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ When you see five or more wasps hovering around garbage receptacles or food, or when you see one known colony within 30 feet of the children's play area or building.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Make sure garbage receptacles have lids that properly seal.</li> <li>▶ Keep food covered and indoors.</li> <li>▶ Eliminate sugary drinks .</li> <li>▶ Remove ripe fruit that drops from trees.</li> <li>▶ Use yellowjacket traps.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Find nearby yellowjacket nests.</li> <li>▶ Hire a PMP to treat the nest directly with an appropriate residual insecticide and then remove the nest afterwards.</li> </ul>

**RESOURCES**

University of California Statewide IPM Program: *Yellowjackets*  
[www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7450.html](http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7450.html)

Department of Pesticide Regulation, *IPM in Child Care*  
[apps.cdpr.ca.gov/schoolipm/childcare](http://apps.cdpr.ca.gov/schoolipm/childcare)

Our Water, Our World: *Controlling Yellowjackets Around Your Home*  
[ourwaterourworld.org.dnnmax.com/Portals/o/documents/pdf/Yellowjackets%2009.pdf](http://ourwaterourworld.org.dnnmax.com/Portals/o/documents/pdf/Yellowjackets%2009.pdf)

eXtension School Integrated Pest Management Action Plans  
[http://www.extension.org/pages/School\\_Integrated\\_Pest\\_Management:\\_Action\\_Plans](http://www.extension.org/pages/School_Integrated_Pest_Management:_Action_Plans)