

# INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT: YELLOWJACKETS



Yellowjackets are wasps that are sometimes called “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 a problem for children and adults when they sting while searching for food or defending their nests. They are more likely to sting when swatted or when their nest is disturbed. If their nest is threatened, yellowjackets will defend it fiercely, 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 (swelling, redness, or difficulty breathing) to yellowjacket stings which can develop anywhere on the body. Life-threatening allergic responses require immediate emergency care.
- ▶ Stings start with a quick, painful jab, which leads to swelling, tenderness, and itching.
- ▶ Other reactions to the sting may include hives, nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramps, and headaches.
- ▶ Symptoms begin 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.

## Yellowjackets and their nests

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, tree branches, or electrical junction boxes found around pools, spas, and sprinklers.
- ▶ may be in empty spaces in walls or ceilings of buildings.
- ▶ are started in the spring by the queen.

## When is yellowjacket season?

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 craving insect protein to sugar as adults. They scavenge for sweet food around garbage bins, 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 or seal rodent burrows with soil.
- ▶ Seal holes and cracks in foundations, walls, roofs, eaves, and electrical boxes.

### 2 REMOVE YELLOWJACKETS’ FOOD

- ▶ Remove attractive foods such as sugary drinks, ripe fruit, meat, pet food, or garbage. Keep food covered and indoors. Once yellowjackets find food they will continue to hunt around the area even after the food is removed.
- ▶ Use liners in indoor garbage cans.
- ▶ Use garbage cans with spring-hinged, domed top lids (these are wasp-proof) in outdoor eating areas.
- ▶ Empty garbage daily and replace liners.
- ▶ Tightly cover recycling cans 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 chemical bait. Meat can be added to the lure traps to improve trapping.
- ▶ Change 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)
- eXtension Integrated Pest Management Action Plan for Yellowjackets  
[www.extension.org/pages/20998/ipm-action-plan-for-yellowjackets#.Vf1AgPIVg4k](http://www.extension.org/pages/20998/ipm-action-plan-for-yellowjackets#.Vf1AgPIVg4k)
- Our Water, Our World: Controlling Yellowjackets Around Your Home  
<http://ecologycenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Yellowjackets-09.pdf>

California Childcare Health Program, University of California, San Francisco School of Nursing • [cchp.ucsf.edu](http://cchp.ucsf.edu)



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