CONTROLLING

YELLOWJACKETS

AROUND YOUR HOME

With their potent sting, yellowjackets can be menacing creatures 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 voracious predators of insect pests such as caterpillars and flies.

IDENTIFICATION AND DETECTION

Yellowjackets are a type of wasp but they 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. 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.

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,
- 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.

If you are finding many yellowjackets inside, you may have a nest in a wall void.

DESTROYING NESTS

Because of the danger of multiple stings, we strongly recommend calling your local vector control district or a private company for information and assistance.

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

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 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.

POISON BAITING

As a last resort in years when yellowjacket populations are extremely high, poison baiting may be necessary. Call a pest control professional.
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 and sweet foods and 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.

WHY YELLOWJACKETS STING
Yellowjackets seldom sting when they are foraging for food, unless they feel threatened. They are, however, likely to attack when their nests are disturbed by a direct blow or by vibrations that are detected by the wasps inside. Mowing the lawn near an underground nest, construction work near a nest in a wall void, or even walking near a nest can provoke an attack by one or more yellowjackets. This is especially true if the nest has been disturbed before.

AVOIDING STINGS
When a yellowjacket approaches:
• Remain calm
• Do not strike at a yellowjacket with sharp, sudden blows. Slow, gentle motions that mimic the movement of a branch in the breeze will be safer in encouraging the yellowjacket to leave.
• You can brush the yellowjacket off with a piece of paper or some other object as long as you move slowly and deliberately.
• Do not squash a yellowjacket. When crushed, many yellowjacket species emit a chemical that can cause other nearby yellowjackets to attack.

PESTICIDES AND WATER POLLUTION
Common household pesticides show up in treated wastewater and in local waterways, sometimes at levels that can harm sensitive aquatic life. So, water pollution prevention agencies have teamed up with participating retail stores, pesticide distributors, and manufacturers to reduce the risks associated with pesticide use. This fact sheet is part of a series of fact sheets and store displays aimed at educating residents about less-toxic pest management. For the rest of the series of fact sheets, visit www.ourwaterourworld.org. Also, look for the “Our Water Our World” logo next to products in participating stores and nurseries. See the Pesticides and Water Pollution fact sheet for information on active ingredients in common pesticides that may cause water quality problems.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION
For more information, contact:
Bio-Integral Resource Center (BIRC)
(510) 524-2567; www.birc.org
University of California Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners in your area
(in the phone book)
University of California IPM website:
www.ipm.ucdavis.edu

PRODUCTS
Examples of trade names for traps listed in this fact sheet
• Rescue! Yellowjacket (disposable)
• Rescue! Trap (reusable)
• Victor Yellow Jacket Trap (use liquid bait such as apple juice)
• Victor Yellow Jacket and Flying Insect Trap (use liquid bait such as apple juice)
• Seabright Yellow Jacket and Wasp Trap (use solid bait such as tuna catfood); (800) 284-7363; www.seabrightlabs.com