

# PEST CONTROL ADVICE SHEET

## WASPS



### WHAT DO THEY LOOK LIKE?

The wasps most commonly seen in the garden and around the home are the worker wasps. They are about 1-2cms in length, have a distinctive black and yellow striped body and are shiny in appearance.

Strangely, wasps are sometimes mistaken for honey bees or hover flies, but they really look quite different. Honey bees have orange and brown stripes and are covered in brown fur. Hover flies, although they are the same colour as wasps, are easy to distinguish by their hovering flight. Both of these insects are useful pollinators of flowers and crops, are generally friendly to people and should not be destroyed if at all possible.

### LIFECYCLE

In the spring the queen wasp emerges from hibernation and starts to look for a suitable place to build a nest. The location of the nest depends on the type of wasp and nests may be built almost anywhere including: loft spaces, sheds, garages, walls and in trees and bushes.

The nest itself is made of small pieces of wood which the wasp chews and mixes with its saliva to produce a paper-like material. The queen builds the first part of the nest and at this stage it is smaller than a golf ball. She lays her eggs inside the nest and feeds them until they hatch out as adults. Once these first worker wasps have hatched, they take over the tasks of enlarging the nest and providing food for the developing eggs.

By the end of the summer the nest will have grown considerably and can be anything from football-sized to several feet wide. An average nest will contain between 3,000 and 5,000 wasps by this stage, but not all of these will be adults.

During the late summer males and new queens leave the nest and mate. The newly fertilised queens will then fly off and look for a suitable place to hibernate for the winter.

As autumn approaches and the weather turns colder, the nest starts to degenerate and all the worker males will die. The nest becomes an empty shell that is never used again.

### WHAT DO THEY EAT?

The worker wasps feed on nectar and fruit, but they will also be seen catching insects which they feed to the young wasps inside the nest.

### ARE WASPS A HEALTH RISK?

Wasps will feed from dustbins, visit waste depots and feed on dead animal bodies and hence are capable of spreading disease. However wasps are mainly thought of as a nuisance pest rather than a serious risk to health.

Wasps can of course sting. The sting is used by the wasp for killing small insects for food, but it is also capable of using it as a very effective weapon. As a general rule, wasps will only sting if they are disturbed. However, at the end of the season the wasps will begin to feed on fermenting fruit which makes them more irritable and more likely to sting people. Wasp stings affect people in very different ways: some are hardly affected at all whilst others may need hospital treatment.

## **IDENTIFICATION AND TREATMENT**

So how do you know if you have a nest? You may be able to see the nest itself; they are normally a grey or yellow colour, approximately round in shape with a small hole at the bottom. However, often the nest is not visible at all and the only indication that there is one is a constant stream of wasps flying in and out of a particular place.

You can treat the nest yourself, but be very careful as wasps can be very aggressive when you start disturbing their home. If you do choose to treat the nest safely yourself, it is most advisable to do this later in the evening when the wasps are at their quietest and avoid using a bright light as the wasps will be attracted to this. (NB: always follow the manufacturer's instructions when using insecticides.)

In many situations you will not be able to treat the nest safely yourself, in which case you can contact a Pest Control Service. After a nest has been treated, it becomes even more active. This activity will gradually die down (normally in about an hour) and within 48 hours there should be no more wasps entering the nest. If there are, a further treatment will be needed.