

# Paper Wasps



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Although paper wasps are not normally as aggressive as yellowjackets, their habit of nesting close to where people live sometimes causes concern. Their familiar open paper nests usually are found under roof eaves and window ledges—the shape of their nest has earned them the name “umbrella wasps.”

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## Identification

Paper wasps, *Polistes* species, are 1/2-inch to 3/4-inch long. They are brown wasps with orange or yellow markings and long legs that hang down as they fly about. Like most wasps, they have a narrow, pinched waist and a spindle-shaped abdomen with a stinger.

Paper wasp nests are open, resembling an inverted umbrella. The nests face downward and, unlike the nests of yellowjackets and hornets, are not enclosed in a paper envelope.

## Biology and Habits

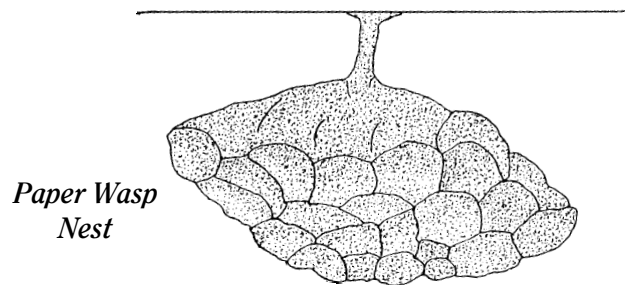
Paper wasps are active from early spring to late summer. There is no worker caste. Each female wasp is potentially a queen. The one female wasp that becomes dominant assumes the role of queen and is cared for by the others. The subordinate wasps also search for food and care for the wasp larvae. Paper wasp colonies are small,

usually fewer than 200 wasps per nest. Colonies endure only for a single season—most colony members die with the onset of winter. Overwintering mated queens take refuge in protected places, including attics, during the winter. In the spring these so-called “foundress” queens begin building new nests.

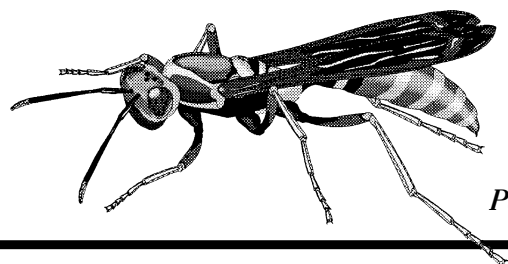
## Personal Protection Against Wasps

A wasp sting can cause a life-threatening allergic reaction in some people. If you are allergic to stings, there are some avoidance techniques you can use. You can lessen your attractiveness to wasps if you forego using hairspray, perfume, or aftershave and don't wear bright-colored clothing,

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*Paper Wasp Nest*



*Paper Wasp*

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especially bright yellow, light blue, red, and orange. Good choices are white or light tan fabrics which are not attractive to them. Be cautious when working in the garden or trimming hedges. If you do end up in an area where wasps are present, don't swat them—this will only increase your chance of being stung.

*Removing a paper wasp nest without spraying it is of no value—the wasps will simply rebuild.*

### **Control Strategies**

Commercial wasp and hornet aerosols are available to treat paper wasp nests. These should be applied to the nest itself, not to individual wasps. Many of these contain pyrethrins or pyrethroids. In addition, some contain a “freezing” agent that stuns the wasps to prevent them

from stinging. Be very careful if you decide to use one of these and be certain to follow label directions.

*Remove all wasp nests, regardless of whether the wasps have been controlled or have died off on their own.*

Since paper wasps are not as aggressive as yellowjackets, control often can be accomplished during the daytime. Remove the nest a day or so after the wasps are killed, so that wasps absent during treatment cannot return and reestablish the nest. Removing a paper wasp nest without spraying it is of no value—the wasps will simply rebuild. After control has been completed, the nest should be removed. Old wasp nests under eaves or window ledges can become sources of carpet beetle infestations inside homes. Remove all wasp nests, regardless of whether the wasps have been controlled or have died off on their own.

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Preparation of this document was financially aided by a grant administered by the Environmental Stewardship Initiative Team, West Virginia University Extension Service.

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Rachel B. Tompkins, Director, Cooperative Extension Service, West Virginia University.

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