

## HOW TO AVOID GETTING STUNG

- DO NOT disturb nests.
- Do not go barefoot.
- Do not attempt to swat yellowjackets with your hands.
- Use lids on soft drinks.
- Keep garbage away from eating areas.
- If eating outside, check food before placing it in your mouth.
- Avoid using items yellowjackets may be attracted to (such as perfume and other scents, hair spray, heavily scented suntan lotion, and brightly colored clothing).
- If exposed to large numbers of yellowjackets, leave the area quickly and cover your eyes and mouth.

## WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE STUNG

- If the stinger remains in your skin, remove it by scraping from the side with your fingernail.
- Wash the area with soap and water.
- Apply cold water or ice in a wet cloth to help with swelling.
- Over the counter sting relief products are available that may help alleviate the pain.
- Do not drink alcoholic beverages.
- Should you show signs of an adverse reaction (dizziness, difficulty breathing, wide-spread swelling, or other symptoms), contact a physician or call 911 immediately.



### Other ways to minimize yellowjacket problems on your property

- Tightly cover garbage containers.
- Properly maintain compost piles.
- Tightly cover can and bottle recycling bins.
- Do not leave pet food outside.



## YELLOWJACKET SERVICE GUIDELINES

**The District only treats in-ground yellowjacket nests.**

Service requests will only be accepted if the resident provides complete and clear information regarding the location of the nest.

1. You must know the location of the nest prior to calling the District.
2. The nest MUST be in the ground.
3. Make sure to place an obvious marker near the location of the nest so that the technician can locate it easily. You may also attach a map of the property or area showing the location of the nest on the front door.

To locate the nest, simply observe the area where the yellowjackets exit and return (in the ground, shrubbery, pile of leaves, debris, etc.).

Residents need not be present to have a yellowjacket nest treated. As a safety precaution we ask that all residents and pets remain indoors during the treatment.

**Marin/Sonoma Mosquito & Vector Control District**  
595 Helman Lane, Cotati, CA 94931  
Monday through Friday 7:00am to 3:30pm  
707.285.2200  
[www.msosquito.org](http://www.msosquito.org)



# YELLOWJACKETS



Cover photo by Sean McCann



PROTECTING PUBLIC HEALTH SINCE 1915

## WHAT ARE YELLOWJACKETS?

The term “yellowjacket” is a common name (not a scientific name) that usually refers to an aggressive, stinging wasp with a yellow and black banded abdomen. Many local species (kinds) of wasps fit this description.

Foraging yellowjackets commonly become a nuisance outdoors especially in the summer and fall. All species of yellowjackets will aggressively defend their nests if disturbed, and unlike honey bees, yellowjackets can sting multiple times.

It is important to note that many local species of wasps are actually considered to be beneficial insects because they prey upon or parasitize other insects, and are typically not aggressive towards people if left undisturbed. However, it should be assumed that any insect resembling a yellowjacket can sting—and is therefore potentially dangerous—especially to those who are hypersensitive to wasp stings.

## Where do they live?

Yellowjackets live communally in paper nests constructed from chewed wood pulp mixed with saliva. The location, appearance and size of these nests vary greatly depending on the species. Some species nest aerially in small, uncovered nests, others nest aerially in large, covered nests, while ground nesting (pest) species construct large, covered nests in abandoned rodent burrows or in other enclosed spaces (tree cavities, wall cavities, wood piles, dense ivy, etc.).

## What do they eat?

All species of yellowjackets consume other insects, and many are also attracted to foods with high sugar content such as candy, fruit, soft drinks and honey. Pest species aggressively gather protein-rich foods such as meat and pet food.



## Are all yellowjackets considered pests?

Aerially nesting species are generally not considered to be pests because they are insectivorous (only eat other insects) and are therefore unlikely to come into contact with humans. However, an aerial nest located near high traffic areas such as doors and windows may become a threat to humans.

Ground nesting species are considered pests because they can be aggressive and commonly come into contact with people at picnics, barbecues, and school lunch areas while foraging for food. These yellowjackets are especially dangerous because they construct large, hidden colonies that are often accidentally discovered by unsuspecting humans.



Photo by Randy, Son of Robert

## SEASONAL HISTORY OF GROUND NESTING YELLOWJACKETS

**Spring:** Each mated queen searches for a suitable enclosed location to construct her nest, such as an underground rodent burrow. She builds several cells and lays one egg in each cell. Yellowjacket larvae develop inside the cells, and within a few weeks the first adult workers emerge. The workers take over the various tasks associated with maintaining/defending the nest and rearing the larvae. This enables the queen to spend virtually all of her time laying eggs.

**Summer:** As the summer progresses, the population of the colony begins to rapidly increase. Adult workers can be observed foraging for food outside, while the queen remains inside the nest for the rest of her life.

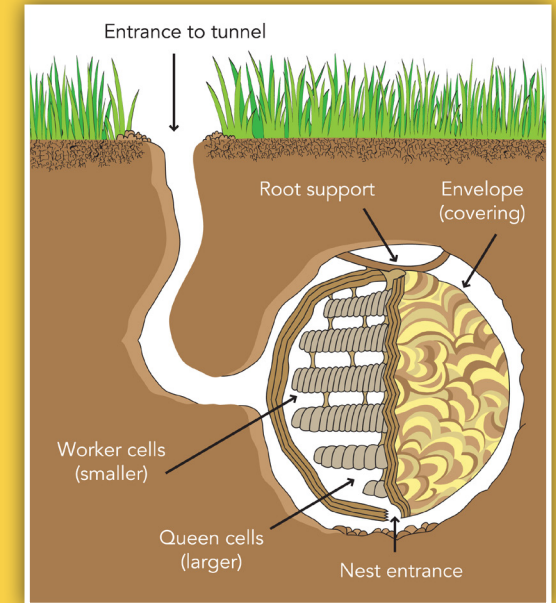
**Fall:** The colony continues to expand, and the nest may house hundreds or even thousands of adult workers. Before the cold weather returns, males and new queens are produced and leave the nest to find mates. During the fall, food typically becomes scarce and yellowjackets become increasingly aggressive.

**Winter:** With the onset of winter, the queen and all of the workers die, and the nest quickly deteriorates. Nests are not reused the following spring. The newly-emerged, mated queens overwinter in dry, protected places (such as fallen logs, tree cavities, or cracks in buildings) and await the spring.



## FOUND AN IN-GROUND NEST?

If an underground nest is located, avoid the area and contact the District to set up a free service request. Please follow the directions listed under Yellowjacket Service Guidelines.



## Found other types of nests? (in trees, shrubs, or attached to buildings)

If necessary, contact a licensed private pest control company listed in the Yellow Pages.

If you cannot find a nest, but are still being bothered by yellowjackets, the use of food or pheromone (odor) baited traps may help to reduce the problem. These traps are available at most hardware and garden stores. Traps should be located away from the house at the edges of the property to reduce contact with people. Follow the instructions provided with the trap and change the bait frequently (stale bait quickly loses its attractiveness).