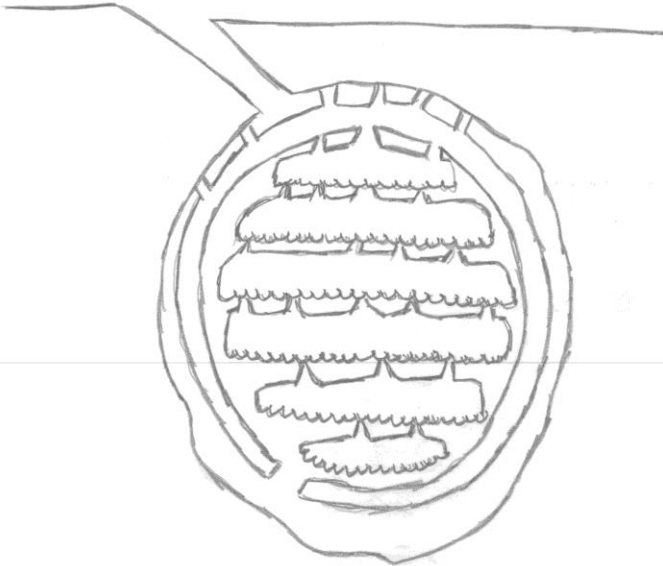


Yellowjackets

Yellowjacket is a term that refers to several types of wasps in the family Vespidae. They are social wasps and are often thought as beneficial. Problems may arise when nests are in populated areas and the chance of being stung by the insect increases.

Yellowjackets are about ½" long with alternating bands of yellow and black on the abdomen. They are often mistaken for honey bees or paper wasps. Honey bees are a bit smaller and have hairy bodies, while paper wasps are reddish-brown with some having yellow markings.

Yellowjackets often build their nest in old rodent burrows, but some will make aerial nests in trees or on eaves of structures. Subterranean nests can often be found in flower beds, pastures, gardens as well as other locations. Aerial nests are often made in trees, under eaves, in storage sheds, garages or wall voids. These wasps construct their nest from a paper-like material using chewed wood fibers mixed with their saliva. Yellowjacket nests are enclosed with a single entry hole and may contain up to 20,000 adult workers in a mature nest, which can be up to 6 feet in size.



Cut-away of ground-dwelling yellowjacket nest showing internal layout.

Yellowjacket nests are abandoned each year and soon after abandonment begin to deteriorate. Occasionally, during mild winters, nests in sheltered spots may not be abandoned. In October and November, queens and males emerge from the nest to mate. After mating, males die while the newly mated queens seek sheltered areas to overwinter. The following spring, these queens emerge to build a small paper nest and begin to lay eggs. Maximum colony size is usually reached by August or September.

If wasps are in an area that can be left undisturbed, then they can be beneficial and help manage pests in the landscape. If there is a chance of a stinging incidence, then wasps should be managed. It is best to hire a pest management professional who has safety equipment needed to treat these wasps.

For more information or help with identification, contact Wizzie Brown, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Program Specialist at 512.854.9600.

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