

Cicada Killer Wasps

Cicada killer wasps, common this time of year, are native to Texas. They are some of the largest wasps that you can find in Texas, reaching up to 1 ½ inches long and can be somewhat frightening if you see them flying about your lawn. Cicada killers have a reddish-brown head and thorax, a black and yellow abdomen, and wings with a rusty tinge. Only females are capable of stinging because the stinger is a modified egg laying structure. Fortunately, female cicada killer wasps are rarely aggressive. Males look similar to females and are territorial. They will buzz near you if you enter their territory, but once you leave the male's territory they ignore you.



Cicada killers are considered beneficial insects because they help to control cicada populations. Cicadas, the noisy insects of summer, are stung and paralyzed by female cicada killer wasps. The paralyzed cicadas are carried back to a burrow that the wasp digs in the ground. The female wasp pulls the cicada into the burrow where it is tucked into a side tunnel. Once there are 3-4 cicadas in the side tunnel, an egg deposited with the cicadas and the side tunnel sealed.

When the egg hatches, the cicada killer larva eats the cicadas provided. The cicada killer wasp that is developing emerges the following year.



Cicada killers usually do not warrant any control methods. If someone is allergic to wasps, people, then insecticidal dust can be sprinkled around the opening of the burrow. Tamp the dust around the opening with your shoe and as the wasps work on cleaning out the entrance to the burrow, they will pick up the dust on their body and eventually die.

Please note that cicada killer wasps are often mistaken for Asian giant hornets (AGH), also referred to as “murder hornets”. AGH have not been found in Texas and have only been located in Washington state within the U.S.

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

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