Entomology Update

September 2012

Paper wasps are reddish-brown wasps, sometimes marked with yellow. The wasps are about ¾- 1 inch in length with smoky wings.

These wasps make a paper nest out of chewed wood fiber. The nest has an open face and hangs from a single filament. The nest is usually constructed in protected areas such as under the eaves of homes, mailboxes or fences.

Mated queens overwinter and emerge in spring to start a small, new nest in which to lay eggs. The colony grows in size throughout spring and summer. During this time workers forage mainly for protein, usually other insects. Because the wasps can help manage pests in the landscape, they are thought to be beneficial. Colonies reach peak size in late summer to early fall. Starting in late summer, paper wasps forage on sugars and may be drawn to human inhabited areas that contain a food source (hummingbird feeders, soda cans, garbage cans, etc.).

Paper wasps tend to be fairly unaggressive, so if their nest is in an area where a stinging incidence in unlikely to occur, it is best to leave it alone. If the nest is built in an area where someone may get stung- in a mailbox, on playground equipment, etc.- then it is recommended to manage wasps and the nest.

Early in the season, when nests are just being started by founding females, it may be possible to discourage paper wasps to nest in a certain area by knocking down the nest repeatedly. This is NOT recommended when the nest is larger and contains multiple wasps.

Aerosol formulations- both synthetic and naturally derived- are available for paper wasp management. The nest should be treated either in the early morning or late evening so all wasps are present. Use caution when treating paper wasps nests. Not only are you using a pesticide, but you are dealing with insects that can sting repeatedly. After all wasps are gone, knock down the nest and throw it away.

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