

Grounds and Landscaping

Stinging Insects!

You might stop and wonder at signs on campus that caution you about yellow jacket, wasp, or bumble bee nests nearby. Why not just call the pest terminator and get rid of them?

All of these insects are beneficial in some way. Yellow jackets and wasps are expert predators, feeding on many garden pests, including mosquitoes. Bumble bees are great pollinators, flying at temperatures well below that which a honey bee will venture out of the hive. Read more.....

At the Grounds Dept., we try to protect these valuable insects as often as is practical and safe. If a nest is near a walkway or building entrance, we will remove it. But if it's in an out-of-the-way location, we'll post signs and caution tape around the area to protect you from inadvertently walk into a nest. Typically, these insects are only aggressive when they are protecting their nest. Yellow jackets can be a nuisance in the late summer when they are looking for high protein food sources (your barbequed salmon, for instance). Most of the time, these insects are foraging for flies, mosquitoes, caterpillars and other garden pests to feed to their young. Or they are pollinating the flowering plants that we grow on campus, many of whose seed heads provide food for birds in late autumn and winter.



Honey bees may swarm in the spring. The old queen and half of the hive will fly away from the hive. The sky will be filled with bees that eventually alight on a branch about 100 ft from the old hive as a mass of insects. This can look very menacing but in fact they are at their most docile during this time. Swarms are very valuable and bee keepers will go to great lengths to retrieve them. At Seattle University, we have had 3 swarms alight on campus in the past 6 years. All were successfully captured and given new homes by local beekeepers. The Puget Sound Beekeepers Association updates their "Swarm List", with telephone numbers of local people to call if you have a swarm.

<http://pugetsoundbees.org/resources/swarm-list/>

How do you tell them apart?

Yellow jackets have a stockier, shorter body than wasps, about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch long. Wasps are typically long and slender with the classic "wasp waist", a narrow middle segment of the body (about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch long). Bumble bee are always fuzzy, sometimes all black with a spot of gold on the head, sometimes mostly golden with grayish black stripes. Bald face hornets are black and white with smooth body parts, no hair, and $\frac{3}{4}$ -1 inch long. Honey bees are smallish ($\frac{3}{8}$ inch long), fuzzy and usually golden and black striped.



Yellow jacket



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In the Pacific Northwest, we have several species of native and introduced yellow jackets and wasps, some with underground nests, and some with aerial nests. The native paper wasp, *Polistes aurifer*, contrary to what its name implies, has an open-combed aerial nest, while the aerial yellow jacket, *Dolichovespula arenaria*, makes the paper-covered nest that most of us think of as the typical wasp nest. Our native western yellow jacket *Vespula pensylvanica* builds its nest underground.

In recent years, two non native species have become widespread in our area. *Vespula germanica*, the German wasp and *Polistes dominulus*, the European paper wasp are more comfortable co-habiting with humans than our native species. Both can become more of a pest problem, nesting under eaves and inside walls of houses and other structures. When we find these two species on campus in nuisance areas, we usually call Jerry the Bee Guy (206.331.1051) to remove the nests.

For more information about these fascinating insects, look at the Washington State University Extension fact sheets, at <http://pep.wsu.edu/pestsense/>

Bumble bee fact sheet <http://www.puyallup.wsu.edu/plantclinic/resources/pdf/pls12bumblebees.pdf>

Yellow jacket and wasp fact sheet <http://cru.cahe.wsu.edu/CEPublications/eb0643/eb0643.pdf>

If you're interested in honey bees, another good resource is the WA State Beekeepers Association

<http://www.wasba.org>