

# FACT SHEET

## YELLOWJACKET: CONTROL

The following information will help you to become familiar with the ecology and control of the German wasp (*Vespula germanica*).



**German Wasp**  
*Vespula germanica*



**Yellowjacket Trap**

### Directions:

1. Take an empty 1 liter plastic water bottle and using a sharp knife or scissors, cut the bottle approximately 1/3 of the way down from the top. Separate the bottle into two pieces.
2. Invert the top section, and place it into the bottom section, and secure the two sections together with tape.
3. Fill the bottle less than half full with sugar water, or add protein bait.
4. Place the trap on the perimeter of the area that you wish to protect.

Most people know and fear the yellow and black-striped "yellowjacket" wasps that are common, uninvited guests to summer picnics. Their stings are painful and they are dangerous for people allergic to insect venom.

### WHAT DO THEY LOOK LIKE?

Yellowjackets are wasps not bees. Bees are fuzzy and feed only on flower nectar. Wasps have shiny bodies and are predators. Yellowjackets, as their name implies, are covered with bright yellow and black markings, and are about 1/2 to 3/4 of an inch long. The most common yellowjacket in Europe is the German wasp, *Vespula germanica*.

### HOW DO THEY LIVE?

Yellowjackets are beneficial in the control of other insects. They capture large numbers of flies, caterpillars and other insects to feed to their young. They have been recorded bringing more than 225 flies an hour to a single nest.

Yellowjackets also scavenge for sugars and meat. They are readily attracted to the sweets and sugars found on candy wrappers, soda cans and pastries deposited in garbage cans.

Most conflicts arise between humans and yellowjackets in late summer, when wasp populations are at their peak, and wasps are attracted to plants with ripening fruit.

### WHAT IS THE THREAT?

Less than 1% of the population have severe allergic reactions to bee and wasp stings. However, some people may experience more serious reactions over time due to repeated stings received throughout their lifetime.

Individuals receiving multiple stings during one event have the greatest risk of experiencing severe allergic reactions due to the increased insect venom.

**If you experience headache, dizziness, nausea, tightness in the chest or throat, unexplained weakness, or hives after any bee or wasp sting, seek medical attention immediately!**

#### ***HOW ARE STINGS PREVENTED?***

Most stings are the result of accidental trapping or pinching of the wasp. You can reduce your chances of being stung by following a few simple rules:

- 1) Remove all outdoor food sources that attract wasps. Feed pets indoors. Keep all garbage cans tightly covered and wash regularly to remove food residues. Remove waste and recycle materials from area regularly.
- 2) Watch where you sit or step. Don't walk outside barefoot! Be especially careful to look before reaching into berry bushes or picking fruit.
- 3) Wasps are attracted to moisture, so be cautious when drinking soda or alcoholic beverages from bottles and cans.
- 4) Never swat at a yellowjacket hovering around you. This will only agitate the insect and may result in you being stung. Instead, quietly move away or let the wasp leave on its own. The only exception to this is if you have accidentally disturbed a nest and you hear a loud buzzing. In this case, protect your face with your hands and RUN!
- 5) Minimize the length of time food is exposed by keeping it tightly covered until just before being served. Clear away scraps and dirty plates as soon as the meal is over.
- 6) Serve sweet or alcoholic drinks in covered cups with drinking straws, so that wasps can't get inside and then sting you in the mouth as you drink. When drinking from can, keep your thumb over the opening between sips.

#### ***WHAT IS AN EFFECTIVE CONTROL METHOD?***

Set up baited yellowjacket traps around the edge of the picnic area or on the end of the table to attract wasps away from the food. Small disposable cardboard traps or reusable ones made of wood and metal screen are sold at garden centers. They work

by attracting wasps to bait placed under an inverted funnel. Once inside the trap, the wasp can not exit back out the funnel. You can construct a simple version of this kind of trap using an ordinary plastic water or soft drink bottle. The instructions for making this trap are found on the front of this fact sheet.

In early and mid-summer, 1-2 traps should be enough for most picnics. In August and early September six or more traps may be necessary. In the early season bait traps with protein foods such as ham, fish, cat food or meat scraps. The wasps need the protein rich food to rear their young. During the late season bait traps with sweet baits, such as jams, honey or rotting fruit.

When the trap is full, simply seal the trap in a plastic bag, and dispose of it. Reusable, commercial traps should be periodically cleaned and re-baited. Use caution before opening these traps. Ensure that all the wasps are dead by submerging the entire trap in a bucket of water for at least 10 minutes.

#### ***HOW ARE NESTS CONTROLLED?***

It is best to have a professional pest control operator take care of yellowjacket nests. If the service is available to you, contact your local installation Pest Control Shop for assistance.

If a professional pest control operator is not available, you can purchase a number of pesticide products labeled for the control of wasps. These ready to use products tend to be aerosols that shoot streams of pesticide over a great distance. You must consider where this stream of pesticide will land if you miss the nest. Most of the products are highly flammable, will damage plastics, or stain or destroy painted surfaces.

#### **ALWAYS FOLLOW THE LABELLED DIRECTIONS WHEN USING ANY PESTICIDE PRODUCT!**

Underground wasp nests are always best left to a professional pest control operator. These personnel have specialized equipment to safely and effectively control the nest. Small nests may be destroyed by pouring several gallons of boiling water into the nest. This should be performed after sunset when the wasps are inactive.