

Wasps Advice Leaflet

1. FACTS ABOUT WASPS

Wasps can be regarded as beneficial insects. As the nests develop during the spring and early summer the workers collect insect larvae and thereby help control garden insect pests. Wasps are often considered a nuisance however, particularly at the end of the summer when worker wasps indulge in their passion for sweet materials e.g. jam, plums, apples, pears. It is the ability of wasps to cause painful stings that concerns most people and unlike bees, wasps can sting several times. A single wasp begins construction on a nest that may eventually house more than 500 adults. The queen lays four or five eggs in a small comb protected by several layers of papery material. She forages for wood fibres that, chewed and matted with saliva, will form new layers for her nest.



A wasp's nest at different stages of construction

The process is deliberate and precise: by the end of the summer, a large nest (bottom, right) contains males, female workers, and a number of specially nurtured new queens, which leave the nest to begin their own nests come springtime. With the onset of severe weather the nests die out. The Queens, which are larger than the workers “over-winter” in warmer undisturbed places like garden sheds, buildings, under loose bark and bird boxes. The Queens emerge in the spring and build their nests again and then start laying eggs. Four to six weeks after the eggs are laid, the first generation of wasps emerge and the life cycle begins again.

2. TREATING A WASPS NEST YOURSELF

Insecticide powder to treat wasps can be bought from most DIY stores, garden centres and supermarkets. It is important to always read the label carefully and only use the insecticide as intended. Wasps' nests should be treated early or late in the day when wasp activity is at its lowest. Firstly, find the entrance to the nest by observing where the wasps are entering. Nests are frequently located in loft spaces, cavity walls, flowerbeds, garden sheds, rockeries and roof eaves. When you have located the entrance puff the insect power in and around the entrance; returning workers will then carry the insecticide into the nest on their bodies contaminating the nest. Within several days all the wasps should be dead.

3. WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE STUNG

The rash or individual 'spot' is usually itchy and may become inflamed and swell. Some people are strongly allergic to stings and can become very ill. If there is any shortness of breath, dial 999. Scratching can infect bites. Although itchy and sometimes painful, stings are rarely dangerous and need only some antihistamine or local anesthetic cream from your pharmacist. Ask your pharmacist for advice. The redness and swelling are usually due to the allergy rather than an infection, a cold compress is usually effective to control redness. Call your doctor if the symptoms will not go away or if you are stung in the mouth, around the throat or receive multiple stings.

REMEMBER: The Pest Control section offers a chargeable service for the treatment of wasps, however if you would prefer to treat the problem yourself we can also offer free advice. For further information or to raise a question please access www.birmingham.gov.uk or telephone 0121 303 6007.