



Patient Education

How to Avoid Stinging Insects

Honey Bees • Wasps • Yellow Jackets • Hornets

Unlike biting insects such as mosquitoes, flies and fleas, stinging insects do not seek sustenance from humans. The sting of these insects is only used against people for self-defense or defense of their nest.

Honey Bees

These bees travel in a straight line from flower to hive. Stings usually occur when someone interrupts a bee in flight, or strikes a flower where a bee is working.

Honey Bees are attracted to flower fragrances, bright colors and smooth-water surfaces. Fragrant perfumes, colognes and powders also act as attractants. The fragrance of some house paints has been known to excite Honey Bees and cause them to behave aggressively.

For safety, clothing should be neutral in color. Hair should be short or tied up during the warm months to avoid entanglements that cause stings.

If a person is stung and cannot identify the insect, see if the stinger is embedded in the sting site. If it is, chances are the sting was from a Honey Bee.

Wasps, Yellow Jackets and Hornets

Wasps feed on the larvae of other insects, which they kill with repeated stings. The stinger is not embedded in the sting site.

The adult wasp lives on juices, sap and nectar. It is attracted to odors such as spoiling foods, soft drinks, fruit juices, leather, perspiration, bright colors and a water supply.

Yellow jackets make their nests in the ground. Paper hornet nests may be close to the ground or high above it. Both of these stinging insects are particularly hazardous to bare feet and ankles.

General Rules for Avoidance and Removal

- The first rule when a stinging insect approaches is to stay still. Remember, people who keep bees professionally wear protective clothing and always move slowly.
- Never slap or brush off an insect of this kind. It will not sting unless frightened or antagonized.
- Be careful when you shake out clothing that has been left on the ground. Wasps or other stinging insects could be in the folds of the clothing.
- Avoid orchards in bloom, clover fields, and any areas that are abundant with flowers. Don't wear bright clothing, perfume or hair sprays.
- Do not mow lawns, trim hedges or prune trees during the dangerous seasons.
- Collisions cause stings, so avoid running, riding horses, bicycles or motorcycles. A convertible automobile with the top down is especially hazardous.
- Keep a "bee cloth" (even in an enclosed car) to trap frightened insects before they sting, or keep an insecticide spray in the glove compartment.
- Remind children not to throw stones or sticks at insect nests.
- Inspect property in the early spring and make periodic inspections all summer until hard frost. (Allergic individuals should not participate in these inspections.)
- Use the skills of an exterminator or the local fire department to remove hornet nests. Bee keepers will often be glad to come to your property and relocate a bee colony.
- Locate yellow jacket nests during the day and demolish them at night when the insects have returned home.
- At least two applications of gasoline, kerosene or lye are needed in the hole where yellow jackets have nested. The fumes do the job, so do not light the gas or kerosene. Wear protective clothing and call an exterminator if you are uncertain about how to proceed.
- Wasps nests can be knocked down with a broom handle after spraying the nest with an insecticide.

Protection Against Shock

- If you experience a severe reaction to the venom of a stinging insect, seek emergency medical treatment immediately.
- Consult an allergist who can determine the insect causing the reaction and provide treatment in the form of venom immunotherapy.
- Your allergist can also provide you with a self-administered epinephrine auto-injector, which you should carry at all times.
- Medical alert tags or bracelets ensure prompt and proper treatment in case consciousness is lost.



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