

## University of Idaho Extension

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## Yellowjackets, Bald-Faced Hornets and Paper Wasps

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March is too early in the season to predict the severity of stinging insects. Our weather in April, May and June will determine if we have a problem in any given year. If our spring weather is rainy and cool, it may reduce the probability of the queen effectively building the new nest and feeding the immature brood. Warm weather in June enhances the success of this process and the new nest.

### What you can do now

These insects survive Idaho winters as solitary, mated queens. They emerge from hibernation during these first warm days of spring. Making an effort to trap the queens now may reduce the nest sites. You can place traps continuously throughout March, April and May. They do not overwinter in the old nests and no nest is re-used.

Knowing exactly what you are dealing with helps with management of these insects. The large, spherical paper nests in trees or on buildings are bald-faced hornets. The nests with open cells resembling an upside-down umbrella around door frames, eaves and other protected spaces, are paper wasps. Finally, most local yellowjackets nest in the ground, and the most aggressive followed by the paper wasps. Aerial yellowjackets will nest above ground and in overhangs. Even though these insects can be considered beneficial, they do pose dangers.

### Trapping Developed Colonies

**Paper wasps** are considered beneficial predators and feed on nectar within our landscapes. They are fairly docile and generally don't aggressively attack unless their nest needs defending. People are usually stung by paper wasps due to an accidental encounter. Yellowjacket traps do not capture paper wasps. Paper wasps primarily feed on prey (caterpillars and soft bodied, leaf-feeding insects) so they do not respond to the same odors as yellowjackets.

**Yellowjackets** scavenge for non-living proteins, carbohydrates or chemicals (heptyl butyrate) encased within a trap. Place traps at least twenty feet away from outdoor living areas to draw the insects away. Replace natural food bait every other day in the heat of the summer so it stays moist. Traps will capture impressive amounts of yellowjackets but will not eliminate colonies. They can fly up to  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile to forage for food.

**Bald-Faced Hornets** almost entirely feed on other living insects (including yellowjackets). They are not usually the pest at your outdoor events. Workers will sting when provoked, however they are usually located high in the trees or high within the eaves of our homes. Unless provoked in these locations, the stinging risk is not as high as with yellowjackets.

Commercial traps are available and you can construct your own from a recycled 2-liter soft drink bottle.

All of these insects will sting to defend themselves when caught between our fingers or squeezed against our skin.

### Controlling Developed Colonies

Unfortunately, there are no biological controls for these stinging insects. On the internet, there are many recipes for poisoned food baits, but they are hazardous and illegal. There are several insecticides that can be applied, but be sure to consider the following advice.

Unless the product specifically states you can use outside in residential yards and gardens AND if specifically for yellowjackets, hornets or wasps; you have the wrong product. The active ingredient in most insecticides off-the-shelf pose a hazard to humans, pets, wildlife and pollinators. Please judge the level of toxicity by recognizing “signal words” on the label of the product:

Caution-“slightly toxic” is the lowest toxicity category

Warning-“moderately toxic” more toxic in smaller doses than those with “Caution”

Danger-none of the insecticides for homeowners carries this signal word. It is highly toxic, corrosive and will cause permanent injury

There are low risk insecticides available. Please consult our Bulletin 852 for details.

### **Safety Precautions before you spray:**

Inspect the nest. Do not spray unless you can see the entrance to the nest

Spray nests after dark

Do not shine a flashlight directly at the nest

Wear heavy clothes and eye protection

Do not apply insecticide to plant foliage – it is very toxic to bees

Contact a pest control operator if the nests are large

Never plug nest entrances as an alternative to pesticide application

*Always read and follow the pesticide label before application!*

Information sourced from:

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Need more information or want to see the UI Extension Bulletin 852? Visit our website at

[www.extension.uidaho.edu/kootenai](http://www.extension.uidaho.edu/kootenai) and click on Idaho Master Gardener Program, then choose Gardening Resources and Publications. The Bulletin is named “Yellowjacket, Bald-Faced Hornets and Paperwasps” or call UI Extension in Kootenai County at (208) 446-1680.

### **Pesticide Disclaimer**

ALWAYS read and follow the instructions printed on the pesticide label. The pesticide recommendations in this article and in the UI publication do not substitute for instructions on the label. Due to constantly changing pesticide laws and labels, some pesticides may have been cancelled or had certain uses prohibited. Use pesticides with care. Do not use unless both the pest and the plant, animal or other application site are specifically listed on the label. Store pesticides in their original container and keep out of the reach of children, pets, and livestock. Trade names are used to simplify the information; no endorsement or discrimination is intended.