

Creature Feature

Autumn Wasp Activity

Many people notice the increased level of wasp activity at their picnic tables and barbeques in the late summer and early autumn and wonder why they've become so pesky all of a sudden.



A wasp colony starts every spring with a single female queen. She mated the previous fall, found a place to overwinter, and begins a new colony by herself each spring. The queen builds the first cells, lays the eggs, and feeds

the larva until they mature into the first generation at the nest. Then the queen focuses on egg laying while the sterile workers build the nest larger, gather food for the queen and larva, and eventually defend the nest. Early in the year the nests are small, with only a handful of wasps. By the end of the summer, the nests have grown in size as has the population. So it's not your imagination - there really are more wasps.

Another important change in the fall is the diet of the wasps. All summer long they have been eating insects, but in the fall, they begin switching to sweeter things like nectar. This draws them into close contact with us as they sip on our soda and graze on our Jell-O salad.

Bees vs. Wasps

Bees, wasps, and ants are all



members of the insect order Hymenoptera.

Wasps have slender bodies, rounded legs, and they look smooth-skinned and shiny.

Bees have more rounded bodies, flattened hind legs (for carrying pollen), and hairier bodies.

Wasps and bumble bees are capable of stinging multiple times. Honeybees can only sting once and die shortly after they sting.

Wasps primarily consume other insects while bees feed on nectar and pollen from plants.

Wasps are important in controlling insect pests while bees are crucial to the pollination of food crops and native plants.



Visit the Information Desk for program information.