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Pest Check

August is the Time for Cicada Killers

Cicada killers are most active during late July and August, which coincides with the appearance of cicadas. Cicadas are large insects that “sing” in the trees during late summer. The female cicada killer will search tree trunks and lower limbs for cicadas, which she will sting and drag back into her burrow.

The female cicada killers usually dig burrows in areas that are sandy, bare, and exposed to full sunlight. They prefer to nest in areas of little vegetation, compared to thick areas of turf grass. Each female captures at least one cicada (some collect two or three) and a single egg is laid in the cicada before being sealed off. Even though an area may contain many burrows, female cicada killers are solitary wasps. This means that each female constructs a burrow and captures her own cicadas to serve as food for her developing young. The cicada killer develop through complete metamorphosis, with four life stages: egg, larva, pupae and adult. However, there is only one generation a year.

Adult cicada killers feed on flower nectar and sap. The female wasps are non-aggressive and rarely sting unless disturbed. Male cicada killers are usually aggressive and tend to defend nesting sites. However males lack a stinger, so they are harmless.

Some Control Options:

Non-Chemical Control Options:

- 1) Apply fertilizers and water turf grass to promote growth.
- 2) Also place mulch in flowerbeds and around shrubs to cover sandy soil to help reduce cicada populations.

Chemical Control Options:

Control is usually not recommended, since this is considered a beneficial insect. However these wasps can become a problem in high traffic areas around homes and in commercial areas such as around swimming pools, flower beds, and golf course greens.

If control is necessary, first the nesting sites should be located. One treatment option is to sprinkle 1 tablespoon of carbaryl dust into the burrow and then close the entrance of the burrow. Other suggestions for spray treatments that are labeled for wasp control include acephate, allethrin, cyfluthrin, cypermethrin, permethrin, and resmethrin. Treatments may be needed for two to three weeks as new wasps move into the area.



Cicada killer, *Sphecius speciosus* (Hymenoptera: Sphecidae). Photo by Bart Drees, Professor and Extension Entomologist, Texas A&M University.

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