



Kimberly Schofield
Program Specialist-Urban IPM
k-schofield@tamu.edu

Paper Wasps

Summer time is not complete without the invasion of paper wasps around eaves. Adult paper wasps are 3/4 to 1 inches in length and have a long, slender, narrow-waist. There are two species of paper wasps, *Polistes exclamans* which is brown with yellow markings on the head, thorax and bands on the abdomen and *Polistes carolina* which is a uniform reddish-brown, both having smoky colored wings. They are most commonly noticed flying during the day in search of food.

Paper wasp nests are open and composed of wood fiber from posts and live plant stems. These fibers are chewed and formed of hexagonal cells in a comb-like shape. These nests can be found underneath eaves, in structures, or around plants. The nests are oriented downward and are suspended by a single filament, with mature nests containing up to 200 cells. Adult paper wasps prey on insects such as caterpillars, flies and beetle larvae, which they feed to developing larvae. This makes them beneficial insects.

In the spring, the fertile queens find a nesting site and begin to build a nest. They will lay a single egg inside each nest cell. The eggs hatch into larvae and then molt several times before pupating. The nest cells will remain open until pupation. The worker wasps help to construct the nest, feed the young and defend the nest from other insects. A mature nest may have between 20 to 30 adults.

In late summer, the queens stop laying eggs and the colony declines. In the fall, only the mated females will find overwintering sites, while the rest of the colony will die.

Paper wasps are usually confused with yellow jackets and bald-faced hornets, but these wasps have closed-celled nests.

Some Control Options:

Non-Chemical Options:

Since paper wasps feed on caterpillars and other insects, they are considered beneficial insects. Other people may be highly allergic to the sting, so removal of the wasps nest from the area around structures is necessary.

Nests can be knocked down from eaves using a high pressure water spray. Also pressurized sprays of insecticidal soaps and oils can be used. In addition, residual insecticides can be used, such as those containing deltamethrin or cyfluthrin.

Be sure to take precautions, so wasps will not attack nearby people or pets. Remember only the females can sting, since they have a modified egg-laying structure (an ovipositor).



Photo: A paper wasp, *Polistes metricus* Say (Hymenoptera: Vespidae).
Photo by Bart Drees, Texas A&M University.

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