

## Yellow Jackets

(Eastern and German Yellow Jackets – *Vespula* spp.)



*Eastern yellow jacket*



*Ground nest entrance*



*Late-season scavenger on sweets*

**Identification** – Yellow jackets are short, stocky, bright yellow-and-black wasps about 1/2 inch long (queens are bigger), with very little hair. People often call them bees. The two we see most here are the eastern yellow jacket and the German yellow jacket. Bald-faced hornets are larger and mostly dark brown with a pale, greenish-white face, and they build a gray, football-shaped paper nest above ground.

**Where they nest** – Yellow jackets generally live in the ground, often an old rodent burrow or a spot under a rock or landscape timber. All you'll see is a hole with a steady stream of wasps going in and out. The paper nest is underground and can hold thousands of workers by late summer. Some nest in wall voids, sheds and crawl spaces, and in a bad year they turn up in odd places: in 2025, the spotted lanternfly year, we found them in trees, walls and patio storage boxes. The colony dies at the first hard freeze; nests aren't reused.

**Why they're a problem** – They're the most easily agitated of the common stinging insects. They guard the nest hard, can sting repeatedly, and an angry wasp releases a scent that calls in more. A mower or string trimmer is enough to set them off. In late summer and fall they also scavenge sugary drinks, food and trash, which is when people get stung at cookouts and pools. For anyone allergic, they're a real risk.

**What we find** – Ground nests often get found the hard way, with a mower or string trimmer. Yellow jackets can forage up to a mile from the nest, so a few foragers don't mean the nest is in your yard. If you see one indoors in early spring, it's probably not a yellow jacket at all but a paper wasp queen waking up from the winter. Yellow jackets coming out of a gap in the siding, or showing up inside in late summer, can mean a nest in the wall.

**What works – Find the nest and treat it directly.** Finding the nest is the trick. Once we know where it is, we treat it as long as it's accessible. If it can't be found, it's difficult to stop the few that wander in. A treated hole is left open so returning wasps pass through the treatment. Nests in walls or attics are a job for a professional. **Never plug the hole:** trapped yellow jackets can chew through drywall into the house.

**What you can do** – Find the nest from a safe distance during the day by watching for steady traffic in and out of one spot, then mark it and keep kids, pets and the mower away. Don't pour gasoline in it, flood it or cover it up. None of these work, and they make the wasps angrier. Outdoors, cover your drinks (check the can before you sip) and keep tight lids on trash cans. Some people treat a ground nest themselves with a labeled insecticide dust, puffed into the hole at night when the wasps are home. If you do, follow the label and cover up, and skip it if you're allergic.

**When to call Dynamic** – Give us a call if the nest is near the house, a play area or anywhere you mow, if it's in a wall, attic or under the siding, or if anyone in the family is allergic. And if you're not sure whether it's a yellow jacket, a paper wasp or a bee, send us a photo and we'll identify it for you.