

Mud Daubers

(Solitary Mud-Dauber Wasps – *Sceliphron*, *Trypoxylon* and *Chalybion* spp.)



Black-and-yellow mud dauber (adult)



Mud dauber nest with exit hole

Identification – Mud daubers are long, slender wasps with a very thin, thread-like waist, and three kinds are common around homes in Northern Virginia. The **black-and-yellow mud dauber** (*Sceliphron caementarium*) is black with yellow markings and yellow legs, about 1 inch long, and builds a cluster of mud cells that is often plastered over into a lump about the size of a fist. The **organ-pipe mud dauber** (*Trypoxylon politum*) is shiny black with white “socks” on the hind legs, and it builds rows of long, skinny mud tubes that look like the pipes of an organ. The **blue mud dauber** (*Chalybion californicum*) is metallic blue-black with bluish wings; it does not build its own nest, but moves into old mud dauber nests and reworks them.

Biology – Mud daubers are solitary wasps. They do not live in colonies or build paper nests like hornets, yellow jackets or paper wasps. The female collects mud and builds tubes or cells under eaves, porch ceilings, decks, garages and sheds. She stocks each cell with spiders she has paralyzed, lays a single egg, seals it with mud, and then she’s gone. She does not come back to guard it. The larva feeds on the spiders. The black-and-yellow mud dauber has several generations a year, so cells built in summer hatch out that same summer, while cells built late in the season overwinter and come out in spring. A tube with a small round hole in it means the wasp has already left. Old tubes are often empty.

Do they sting? – Mud daubers are very docile and rarely sting. Unlike social wasps, they do not defend their nests. Only the female has a stinger, and she uses it to paralyze spiders. A person is rarely stung unless the wasp is grabbed or trapped against the skin. Male organ-pipe daubers may buzz loudly near a nest, but males cannot sting.

Beneficial – Mud daubers are considered beneficial insects. They clear a lot of spiders from around the home, and the blue mud dauber is known for hunting black widow spiders. Adults also feed on flower nectar.

Control – No treatment is required. Mud daubers can make a mess, but that’s all it is: a wad of dried mud on the house. Tubes within reach can usually be knocked down with a broom handle or scraped off with a putty knife. You will likely need to pressure wash the area to remove the mud completely. Removing tubes in the fall or winter also removes next season’s brood. Mud daubers like the same sheltered spots year after year, so check eaves, porches and decks each spring. If you’re not sure whether it’s a mud dauber or a stinging wasp nest, send us a photo and we’ll identify it for you.