

Wasps

Vespula Species

Wasps are unwelcome immigrants to New Zealand and are rapidly increasing in numbers throughout the country. Their stings can be dangerous especially to the many people who are allergic to them, so it is worthwhile to be informed and prepared in advance. They pose a serious threat in homes, schools and recreational areas such as parks, forests or beaches. Wasps can also have a serious impact on the environment, as they consume large numbers of native insects, which are an important food source for native species including the kaka, tui and geckos.

Wasps have even been known to kill chicks in the nest.



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Living with Wasps

Wasps are attracted to sugars, meat and food in general. If you are eating outdoors they will probably show an interest in your food. Don't panic or make frantic movements. Just brush them away quietly or move indoors if they persist. About 10% of people are allergic to wasp stings. These people should carry antihistamine tablets with them at all times. If you receive a sting on the head, face or neck, you may be restricted from breathing because of swelling. In these cases, you should seek medical attention immediately. If you get stung, apply antihistamine cream (available from your chemist) or a cold compress. This will reduce the pain and swelling. Wasps don't usually leave their sting in (bees do) and male wasps do not have a sting at all.

What do Wasps look like?

There are four species of wasp in New Zealand. The two most commonly seen in our Region are the German Wasp and the Common Wasp, both of which were accidentally introduced from Europe.



German Wasp – the German wasp has been in New Zealand since the 1940s. It can be identified by its wide yellow band and the separate black dots and rings on its back. The nest of a German wasp is grey, usually about the size of a soccer ball and found below the ground.



Common Wasp – The common wasp is a recent arrival in New Zealand but is already widespread. It can be identified by the wider black bands on its back and the black dots are fused to these bands. The nest of the common wasp is brown, usually about the size of a soccer ball and found below the ground. German and Common Wasps look very similar. It is possible to tell the females of the two species apart, but the males can only be reliably distinguished by examination under microscope.



Asian Paper Wasp – The Asian Paper Wasps are not commonly found in our Region. Their bodies are mainly black with narrow yellow stripes and they have tan legs. The females are longer and more slender than Common or German Wasp females, and are larger than the males. They have delicate paper nests (about the size of a pear) and are usually found above the ground.



Australian Paper Wasp – Australian Paper Wasps are not commonly found in our Region. They are dark and light brown in colour and have paper nests similar to the Asian Paper Wasp.

Wasp Traps

Wasps are here to stay so it is prudent to control their activity and spread, as far as we can. Outdoors large numbers can be killed using a simple trap made from a plastic soft drink bottle.

1. Cut the top quarter off a plastic soft drink bottle.
2. Invert the top and glue it back on so that the narrowing opening faces down into the bottle.
3. Half fill the trap with a mixture of water, sugar (1 tablespoon per 100mls) and a little detergent (1 teaspoon).
4. The trap can be anchored with a wire loop.



Wasps will be attracted to the sugar and will land

on the surface of the water. The detergent breaks the surface tension so the wasps sink and drown.

Destroying Nests

Wasps normally forage within 200 metres of their nests. To find a nest site, observe the flight paths of the wasps at dawn and dusk. You can make wasps easier to follow by attracting them to bait and sprinkling them with flour or icing sugar so they are more visible.

German and Common Wasps usually build nests near or under the ground. To destroy the nest yourself, locate all the entrances and return at night when the wasps are asleep. Tip or sprinkle a tablespoon of Carbaryl insecticide (available from garden centres) into each entrance. Wasps coming in and out will carry the poison and kill wasps in the nest.

You may have to repeat this in about seven days if young wasps are still emerging. Block up the entrances when activity ceases. Paper wasp nests are usually found 1-5 metres above the ground and are more easily destroyed. Wasps around the nest can be killed using household fly spray. Again it is best to approach nests at night, but do not use a torch. The wasps can fly up the light beam and sting you. Remove the nest containing the larvae by snipping it off at the base with scissors and dropping it in a plastic bag. Freeze for three days or seal the bag and place in the rubbish.

Control

Private contractors are best able to provide user-pays services to control nuisance nests. Horizons offers advice and information, and if appropriate a user-pays service, to assist the control of these troublesome pests.

The Wasp is identified in Horizon's Animal Pest Management Strategy as a 'Non-Statutory problem animal'. This means that it is an undesirable animal, but has not met all the criteria for inclusion as an animal pest