

## Health Services Fact Sheet: Bees and Wasps Version 8 June 2022

### WASPS

The European Wasp is easily identified by its bright yellow legs and body and black triangular markings on the abdomen. In comparison to bees, wasps are larger and less hairy. European Wasps are not usually aggressive unless aggravated. They do, however, have the ability to sting many times and do not die after stinging.



### Finding the Nest

European Wasps often make their nests where shelter is available such as holes in the ground, wall cavities and trees. They rarely nest out in the open. A nest is usually detectable by a stream of wasps entering and leaving a hole. They can be found in large communal nests, normally only visible as a small entrance hole.



European Wasps do not hover but fly directly backwards and forwards to the nest. To find the nest, you need to establish the direction the wasps are flying in. European Wasp nests are generally ball shaped and made from a grey coloured material similar to Paper Mache.

Once the nest has been located, do not disturb it during daylight. If disturbed, European Wasps will release a chemical which triggers other wasps to the nest as a defence. Keep family and animals away from the nest.

### Eradication of European Wasp Nests on Private Land

If you are able to access the wasp nest safely, you can purchase insect dust which is available from the supermarket or hardware shops. This is a white dust and for best results it needs to be put into the mouth of the nest at night when the wasps are inactive. The wasps will carry this dust on their body as they travel in and out of the nest the following day. Usually two applications will be sufficient. It is important to read and follow the manufacturer's instructions/recommendations when using any pesticide.

If the insect dust has not worked, or the nest is not readily accessible, it is advisable to contact someone in pest control. Numbers can be obtained from the Yellow Pages.

European Wasps are attracted to meat and sweet foods, which is why they can be a nuisance at BBQ's and outdoor dining. They do not collect pollen from trees and flowers but are attracted to nectar.

- Do not leave food scraps lying around
- Where possible, avoid leaving uneaten pet food or dog bones outside
- Ensure rubbish bins have lids tightly fitted
- Keep compost covered
- Cover water sources when not in use – e.g. pools
- Where possible, don't drink out of cans or bottles outside. Use clear containers or straws

- Cover exposed food at BBQ's and picnics
- Cover bird baths and fish ponds with shade cloth

## BEES



Bees play a crucial role in pollinating plants throughout our environment. When bees travel from flower to flower they transport pollen to other flowers allowing plants to develop seeds and reproduce. Bees are necessary for our agricultural industry pollinating more than 90 of our key flowering crops such as apples, asparagus, avocados, blueberries, broccoli, celery, cherries, citrus crops, cranberries, cucumber, kiwis and melons, just to name a few.

Bees also provide us with honey and wax products that can be used for consumption and medical products.



If we can protect or relocate bee swarms rather than having them destroyed they will continue to work for the benefit of the community.

<https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/livestock-and-animals/honey-bees>

Bees are social insects that form hives. The adults feed on pollen and nectar and larvae may be foliage eaters or woodborers.



Swarming is part of the natural reproductive life cycle of honeybees. When a bee colony becomes too large it divides by swarming. Swarming is the process by which a new honey bee colony is formed when the queen bee leaves the colony with a large group of worker bees.

In the prime swarm, about 60% of the worker bees leave the original hive location with the old queen. This swarm can contain thousands to tens of thousands of bees.

Swarming is mainly a spring phenomenon, usually within a two- or three-week period depending on the locale, but occasional swarms can happen throughout the producing season. Secondary afterswarms may happen but are rare. Afterswarms are usually smaller and are accompanied by one or more virgin queens. Sometimes a beehive will swarm in succession until it is almost totally depleted of workers.

Here in Victoria the swarming season is usually between September and December. However, occasionally colonies may swarm at other times. Warmer weather, combined with an abundance of nectar and pollen, stimulate the colony to increase in population. Swarms usually emerge from the colonies between 10am and 2pm on warm sunny days.

A swarm of honeybees will cluster temporarily at one location, often hanging off the branch of a tree or bush, while a few scout bees locate a new home. When a suitable home is found the swarm moves as a group to that new site. This is usually after a few hours or up to a couple of days.

Preventative measures include disposing of all rubbish effectively; having tight fitting lids on bins; and disposing of all food scraps appropriately.

If people keep away from these swarms they will usually leave the site in a few hours and of their own accord; its only when the swarm rests on objects that are likely to bring them in close contact with people (or animals) that the swarms may need to be relocated urgently and the swarm taped off to prevent accidental contact with the bees.



Whilst pest control companies can kill and remove the bees, there are some beekeepers (apiarist) that are prepared to collect swarms free of charge. Refer to the Yellow Pages for contact details.

The Latrobe Valley Bee-Keepers Association (LVBA) offer a swarm collection service, as well as the removal of bee nests where possible. To assist in finding a nearby swarm collector, telephone the LVBA on 0466 041 199, contact their email [LatrobeValleyBees@gmail.com](mailto:LatrobeValleyBees@gmail.com) or via their Facebook page

### How Council Can Assist

Council strongly encourages residents to discuss the issue with relevant householders if they think bees and wasps are coming from their neighbour's property. Should this approach prove ineffective, Dispute Settlement Centre provides a range of free, confidential dispute resolution services. They may be able to assist without the need for expensive legal proceedings and can be contacted on 1800 658 528 (toll free).

**If you find a wasp nest on Council land, contact Council's Health Services Team on 1300 367 700.**

**For further information please contact Latrobe City Council's Health Services Team on 1300 367 700.**