



The Common Wasp - *Vespula Vulgaris*

Wasps are mainly known for their nuisance value, particularly in the autumn. The combination of the cooler weather and a diet of fermenting fruit juices make them irritable, and therefore more likely to sting.

Appearance

There are several species of social wasp found in this country, but all are similar in appearance. They are all bright yellow and black, about 10 - 20 mm in length, except for the hornet, which is somewhat larger and brown and yellow in colour. They have a very slim waist and are a lot less hairy than bees.

Life Cycle

The only wasps that can survive the winter are the young fertilised queens. A queen will emerge from her winter hibernation around mid-April, and find a suitable site for her new nest. Common nest sites are loft space, wall cavity and sheds. The queen then builds the first cell to the new nest herself using chewed wood pulp, and lays between 10 and 20 eggs. She then feeds the resulting larvae until they emerge as workers, and take over the tasks of enlarging the nest and providing food for the subsequent larvae.

The nest will usually grow to the size of a football and will be home to about 5000 individuals, but in some cases can be quite a bit larger. In the late summer, a generation of males and young queens emerge. They mate, and the queens seek a place to hibernate. The other wasps will gradually die off as the weather cools, and the cycle starts again the next spring. The nest will not be used again.

How can wasps nests be controlled?

If a nest is in a place where it gives cause for concern there are a number of products available to kill the nest. Whichever product you use, you are advised to read the label and follow the instructions carefully, taking all necessary precautions.

If you are to treat a nest yourself consider the risk of being stung. Whilst for most people this is a painful annoyance, there is a significant minority who are allergic to the stings, and can suffer very extreme reactions.

It is advisable to treat a wasps nest early or late in the day when it is cooler, preferably about dusk, as it is most likely that all the adults will have returned to the nest, and they will be very much less active. Even without treatment a nest can only last one season.

ALWAYS READ THE LABEL BEFORE USING ANY INSECTICIDES