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Alert: Protect yourself from yellowjackets on the rampage



By Cynthia Brian



Felipe from Contra Costa Vector Control dressed for eradication.

Photo Cynthia Brian

When we think of yellowjackets, we normally associate these pesky stingers with interrupting barbecues, picnics, and outdoor festivities during the summer months. What most people don't realize is that yellowjackets are the most aggressive during late autumn to mid-December. These wasp-like, six-legged, black and yellow flying pests are found anywhere throughout the United States wherever humans commune. Although they are pollinators, they eat meat, fish, and sugary foods. They are also attracted to perfumes and sweet smells.

At this time of year, larvae in the cells mature into males and females who mate. For this reason, the workers are diligently protecting the nest and will attack with a vengeance anyone that comes near. The nests are usually in a hole in the ground, in a bush or at the base of a tree, although they will build nests in attics or other living spaces. If you are raking leaves and inadvertently come close to an area where a yellowjacket nest resides, a swarm of stinging scavengers will chase you, stinging repeatedly, sometimes causing dire allergic reactions. When we brush off or kill these insects, they release a pheromone that signals other yellowjackets nearby to attack. They are extremely territorial and if the nest is not exterminated, the fertilized eggs that hatch into queens in the spring will create a new nuisance ... many more colonies of these pests. The workers will die when the weather turns extremely cold and the queen goes into hibernation.

If you detect a swarm of yellowjackets, call either an extermination company for a paid service or Vector Control for free extermination at (925) 685-9301.

Remedies for yellowjacket stings:

Because yellowjackets are defending their colony, they can be very aggressive and dangerous.

If you or your pet is allergic or are stung multiple times, seek medical assistance immediately. Besides the pain, swelling and itching, a large quantity of venom can cause nausea, fever, vomiting, fainting and anaphylactic shock. Delayed reactions, such as encephalitis, that occur weeks after a sting are rare but do occur. Contact your physician.

For immediate treatment of mild stings using a home remedy, make sure the stinger is not embedded in the skin. If you are outside, apply a compress of cold mud. As soon as possible do any of the following:

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