



# Wasps

*Vespula spp*

## Introduction

Wasps are common all over Britain. They are social insects, forming colonies inside nests, which they normally construct out of chewed wood in soil banks, roof spaces and in trees and hedges.

## Life cycle

### Spring

The fertilised queen wasp emerges around mid-April to search for a suitable place to nest. At this time of year it is common to find the large queen wasps trapped inside homes and sheds – but this does not mean that you necessarily have a nest – the wasps accidentally enter through an open door or window. The nests themselves constructed of chewed wood, which is rasped off fences, sheds or other wood sources. The queen wasp makes an initial “cell” which is smaller than a golf ball and within individual chambers inside this “cell”, she lays between ten and twenty eggs. She feeds the resulting larvae on insects, mainly houseflies.

### Summer

The emergent first brood of adult workers takes over the tasks of feeding and nest building, while the queen stays within the nest laying eggs. By late August the nest may be the size of an inflated dustbin liner and contain up to 5000 wasps. Wasp nests on buildings are very noticeable with a steady stream of wasps going in and out of the area that the nest is located in.

### Late summer to autumn

At this time of the year the nest produces males and queen wasps, the existing queen wasp will die. The new queen wasps will mate then fly away to choose a place to hibernate and over winter. The remaining wasps do not have any new young to feed (as the old queen is dead) so their diet consists of high energy foods such as sugars and over ripe fruit, it is this that makes them “tipsy”, lazy and aggressive in behaviour to anyone interfering with them. This also coincides with holidays and the hottest part of the year, which is when we tend to consume a lot of sweet substances outside.

### Winter

The first few frosts will kill off any remaining male wasps in the nest, only the individual queens survive in hibernation to start new colonies in the following spring. The existing nest is redundant and will never be used again, it is safe to remove it at this time of year but if it's in an area where it can't be seen it can be just left in place.

## What should you do about wasps?

You may notice a nest by seeing large numbers of wasps flying in and out of an area that the nest is located in and this is usually spotted around July and August depending on the weather. If the nest is causing concern, it can be dealt with by one of our pest control officers who are used to handling such problems.

If you wish to destroy the nest yourself you can purchase various wasp insecticidal powders and sprays from garden centres and follow the directions on the packet. Wasp sprays are normally used if you can see the whole nest and powders are applied to the entrance to the nest, areas where wasps are flying in and out of, for example airbricks, holes in the ground etc.

### **European Wasps**

These wasps are relatively new in this country and favour building the nests in hedges and shrubs. The European Wasp is very fast to defend the nest site and will attack in large numbers if disturbed.

**I strongly recommend that (unless you know what you are doing) you leave wasp nest treatments to the professionals.**

If a wasp's nest is not near the house or in an area that you can avoid for the summer, it can be left alone as since they destroy pest insects and play a minor role in pollination.