

(revision date:10/11/2018)

Stinging Wasps: Paper wasps

Use Integrated Pest Management (IPM) for successful plant problem management.

Biology

Native paper wasps live in small groups of 6-20 in papery nests hanging from stalks under eaves or from branches in bushes and trees. These wasps search plants for caterpillars, beetle larvae and other suitable prey which are chewed, then fed to the larvae in the nest. Unless paper wasp nests are in 'high-traffic' areas like a doorway, paper wasps usually do not sting people. If you leave them alone they will leave you alone. However, an aggressive, introduced paper wasp species, the European paper wasp (*Polistes dominula*), has recently spread to the Pacific Northwest and should be discouraged in gardens by removing their nests. It is recognizable by being the only paper wasp with mostly orange antennae.

Prey or Pest Targeted

~ Caterpillars, spiders, mantids, beetles,

Attracting and Keeping Beneficial Insects in Your Yard

- ~ Avoid regular use of synthetic, broad-spectrum pesticides. Infrequent use of certain narrow-spectrum pesticides is more compatible with some beneficials but generally the less chemical inputs there are, the greater and more diverse the beneficial insect community will be. Extensive lawns are also not conducive to attracting and retaining a diversity of beneficial insects, mites and spiders. Minimize lawn areas and maximize shrub and bush plantings. Many beneficials reside naturally in riparian and other 'natural' areas near to many back yards. Natural dispersion from these refuges ensures that some beneficials will visit back yards but they will not stay unless food, host and shelter resources are available. Native plants have closer affinities with native insects and therefore provide most of these resources. A garden with a good diversity of local native flora in and around back yards, will improve the abundance and diversity of local, beneficial arthropods. Native flora also provides natural overwintering sites for many beneficial insects and it is useful to leave at least a small area of native vegetation undisturbed during fall and winter.
- ~ Some kinds of beneficial insects (e.g. lady beetles, lacewings, predatory mites) are available for purchase from commercial suppliers. However, benefits from introducing these beneficials are usually limited and short-lived. Upon release, commercially obtained lady beetles and lacewings often disperse and may rapidly leave your backyard despite the presence of prey and suitable nectar resources. Generally, it is more effective and sustainable to create a garden habitat that will be colonized by beneficials naturally.

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Images



~ Caption: Introduced European paper wasp,
Polistes dominula (Vespidae)
~ Photo by: D.G. James