

European wasp

March 2015 Primefact 1370 2nd edition
Plant Biosecurity & Product Integrity, Orange

European wasp is an aggressive stinging insect

European wasp (*Vespula germanica*) is an established pest in New South Wales

For nest removal, call a pest controller

European wasp

European wasp (Figure 1) is identified by:

- black and yellow body
- yellow legs
- triangular markings on the abdomen
- black antennae

The European wasp is the same size as the European honeybee but European wasp is less hairy and folds its wings back at rest.

Nuisance pest

European wasps are scavengers. They are attracted to sweet foods and meat and are commonly a nuisance at outdoor eating venues and barbeques.

If left alone the European wasp is not aggressive to humans or other animals. If a European wasp is aggravated it may sting. Unlike the bee, a European wasp can sting multiple times.

If a nest is disturbed, the wasps release a chemical which triggers the colony to defend the nest and attack the threat in large numbers.

First aid

If stung, apply a cold pack to reduce the swelling.

Stings to the face or neck or multiple stings may lead to severe swelling or an allergic reaction. If this occurs and the person has difficulty breathing call an ambulance. If in doubt seek immediate medical advice.



Figure 1 European wasp has yellow and black banding on the abdomen and black antennae



Figure 2 European wasp nest

Colony behaviour

In spring European wasp queens leave their place of hibernation and search for suitable nest sites to establish a new nest. The first eggs laid hatch into workers.

The workers take over the nest chores and build a nest from saliva mixed with wood fibres. A nest can grow over summer to the size of a football. The nest is often concealed underground or in a roof or wall cavity (Figure 2).

In autumn the queen lays eggs for the next generation of queens. Once hatched most queens leave the nest, mate and hibernate until spring.

Actions to minimise risk

To discourage wasps:

- Do not leave fallen fruit or food scraps lying around your property
- Avoid leaving uneaten pet food or dog bones outside
- Make sure rubbish bins have tight fitting lids
- Keep compost covered at all times
- Keep your swimming pool covered when not in use
- Cover exposed food at picnics and barbeques
- Check drink cans or bottles before drinking from them. Use clear containers or a straw.

Distribution

European wasp is a native of Europe, North Africa and Asia Minor. European wasp is now found throughout the world, including Canada, the United States of America, South Africa, Argentina, Chile and New Zealand

Australian distribution

European wasp was first found in Tasmania in 1959 and on the mainland near Melbourne in 1977.

European wasp is now widespread in Australia.

Spread

Human assisted transport of hibernating queens in packaging material and other items has spread European wasp worldwide.

Under natural conditions European wasp could probably disperse several kilometres but flight distances have not been confirmed.

Acknowledgments

Photos courtesy of Lowan Turton,
NSW Department of Primary Industries

This Primefact replaces Agfact A9.91 (1981)

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Published by the NSW Department of Primary Industries.

PUB14/149