

## Life cycle of the wasp

### In Spring

In April, queen wasps emerge from their winter hibernation in lofts, sheds or other frost-free areas. Each will construct a small nest of a papery substance made from chewed wood fibres. The nest will be about the size of a golf ball and may be in a loft, air brick or similar sheltered situation. About 15 eggs are laid inside and the resulting grubs are fed on insects caught by the queen. At the end of May, these new workers will be fully developed and they then help by feeding the next generation of grubs, enlarging the nest and protecting the colony. These workers will fly up to 400 metres from the nest to find food.



### Summer

By late summer, the colony will have grown to the size of a football and may contain over 5000 wasps. At this stage, the work of rearing the young ceases. The wasps may now indulge their appetites for ripe fruits and other sweet foods. This is usually the stage when they become a nuisance and will sting if annoyed.

### Autumn

The worker wasps all die in the autumn as the weather gets cold, but a few hundred young queen wasps from each colony will seek shelter elsewhere to hibernate over winter. Usually around 2% of them survive, and in April they emerge and start new colonies of their own.

### Nuisance Wasps

If you are troubled by a few wasps then you may wish to use a household flying insect spray to kill them. Always read the label before use. Remember that some insecticides are not safe for use near food.

**Of course there is no need to kill every wasp you see.** Throughout the summer they are performing a useful task of killing hundreds of other insects that are themselves a problem in the home and garden. So if they are not causing you a problem, then leave them alone. On the other hand, if you are being pestered by dozens of wasps daily then there is probably a colony nearby that you may wish to destroy.

### Colonies

Wasp nests can often be located by careful observation on a sunny day when they are most active. By following the line of flight you may be able to identify the hole leading to the nest in a roof, air brick, shed or compost heap.

The colony will die in autumn and will never be used again. You may therefore decide to wait and let the wasps die off naturally.



## Treatment

Harrow Council offers an affordable, chargeable service for domestic and commercial premises for wasps. Please visit our website or telephone us on 020 8424 7666 for information on pricing.

## Stings

Wasps will sting if provoked and this can be very painful. The venom can produce considerable swelling as well as discomfort. The usual treatment is washing with soap and water then applying something cold to reduce swelling. Pharmacists also have special sprays and creams which help reduce the pain and inflammation. Very occasionally, stings are dangerous, such as when a swollen tongue obstructs breathing, or an allergic response creates a severe shock. In these cases, medical aid is needed immediately.

## Bees

The honey bee and bumble bee are also colony living insects with a black and yellow striped body and a sting. Bees have important benefits and must not be routinely treated as a pest because of the valuable work they do in pollinating flowers, crops, fruit trees and producing honey. Bees are generally more hairy than wasps. Wasps have a much clearer pattern of yellow and black stripes and spots on their body and a more streamlined shape.



The council does not provide a pest control service for bees but can offer advice and has a list of bee keepers who are able to assist the public. If you have a problem with a bee swarm or nest, a local bee keeper may be able to assist for a reasonable fee. We have a list of the local ones; please contact us for details.

## Other insects

Hover flies have a similar appearance and a distinctive flight pattern of hovering in mid air then suddenly darting to another spot. They have no sting and are great consumers of aphids!

**Advice on the identification and control of all household pests is provided free of charge and is available by phone, email or via our website.**

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