



Carpenter Bees

Carpenter bees somewhat resemble bumble bees, except bumble bees have dense yellow hairs on the abdomen and large pollen baskets on the hind legs. Various species of bumble bees and carpenter bees are similar in size.

In the late-spring and early summer, you may notice large, black bees hovering around the outside of your home. These are probably carpenter bees searching for mates and favorable sites to construct their nests. Male carpenter bees are quite aggressive, often hovering in front of people who are around the nests. The males are quite harmless, however, since they lack stingers.

Female carpenter bees can inflict a painful sting but seldom will unless they are handled or molested.

The life cycle (egg, larva, pupa, adult) is completed in approximately seven weeks, although developmental time may vary depending on the temperature. The new adults typically remain in their gallery for several weeks then chew through the cell partitions and venture outside in late August. They collect and store pollen in the existing galleries, but also spend much of their time just huddled together inside a gallery. These new adults hibernate in galleries because they require shelter during the winter. They then emerge the following spring. There is one generation per year.

Carpenter bees tunnel into wood to lay their eggs. Bare, unpainted or weathered softwoods are preferred especially redwood, cedar, cypress and pine. Painted or pressure-treated wood is much less susceptible to attack. Common nesting sites include eaves, window trim, fascia boards, siding, wooden shakes, decks and outdoor furniture. They emerge in the spring, usually in April or May. After mating, the fertilized females excavate tunnels in wood and lay their eggs within a series of small cells. The cells are provisioned with a ball of pollen on which the larvae feed, emerging as adults in late summer. The entrance hole and tunnels are perfectly round and about the diameter of your finger. Coarse sawdust the color of fresh cut wood will often be present beneath the entry hole, and burrowing sounds may be heard from within the wood. Female carpenter bees may excavate new tunnels for egg laying, or enlarge and reuse old ones. The extent of damage to wood which has been utilized for nesting year after year may be considerable.