



Yellow Jacket Wasps

Yellow jackets are black-and-yellow wasps. They can be identified by their distinctive combination of black-and-yellow color, small size (slightly larger than a bee), and entirely black antennae. Like some other vespids, they live in colonies and build globular paper nests. Workers are around 12-20 mm in length, depending on species, and feed on nectar, while collecting other foods for their larvae. They can sting repeatedly and without apparent provocation, and so can be major pests. They will sting in order to defend their nest. In autumn, they switch from collecting arthropods and nectar to scavenging other food sources, which can increase their contact with people.

Yellow jacket nests usually last for only one season, dying off in winter. The nest is started by a single queen, called the foundress, and typically can reach the size of a basketball by the end of the season. In southwestern coastal areas of the United States, the winters are mild enough to allow nest overwintering. Nests that survive multiple seasons become massive and often possess multiple egg-laying queens.