

Don't Get Stung!



Everything you need to know to appreciate, recognize and protect yourself from wasps and bees!



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*Le centre hospitalier
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Pour l'amour des enfants

Université
de Montréal

Eeek! A wasp!

Stay calm! After all, wasps and bees are very useful insects. By foraging from flower to flower in search of nectar or pollen, they pollinate many plants, so that they can produce fruit. Without these insects, our orchards and blueberry fields would be much emptier—and so would our plates. And that's not all! By preying on other insects (flies, caterpillars), wasps actually save us a lot of inconvenience and damage. And honey bees have the delicious recipe for... honey.

Eeeeeek! It's trying to land on me!!

All right, let's admit it. Wasps can be a real bother, especially when they make their nest right next to your patio. Worse yet, the venom that a bee or wasp injects when it stings you can cause pain and swelling, and sometimes even a dangerous allergic reaction.



A yellow jacket uses its strong mandibles to cut and grind up its food.

Why do they sting?



It's not because they want to drink our blood, like mosquitoes. They're just trying to defend themselves or their nests.

Many species of wasps, honey bees and bumble bees are social insects. That means that they live in

colonies in nests they build themselves, where they raise larvae to become workers, drones and egg-laying queens.

The workers constantly come and go from the nest to fetch food for the larvae. If a worker out foraging or near the nest spots something making a lot of noise and wild gestures (YOU or your pet, for instance) it may well interpret all this fuss as a threat. If so, watch out! You may get stung.



The stinger is located at the tip of the wasp's abdomen.

Yield!

IF a wasp is bothering you...

Don't make any sudden moves.

IF a wasp lands on you...

Wait for it to leave by itself or gently shoo it away.

IF you disturb a nest...

Get away as quickly as possible.

Sting pointers

So you're off on a picnic or a stroll? Or perhaps your work takes you outdoors?

- Keep any sweet food and meat in closed containers. Adult wasps look for sugar to feed on, and for proteins to take back to the colony for the larvae, which are carnivorous.
- Keep a close eye on your food, and especially on children's food. Before swallowing a mouthful of food or taking a gulp of juice or pop, make sure there isn't a wasp in it. A wasp can still sting if it's in your mouth or throat.
- Long-sleeved tops and long pants are best. Tie back your hair. Wear a hat with mosquito netting if necessary.
- Don't walk around in bare feet. Some species make their nests underground.
- If a wasp flies into your car, open the windows. It will find its own way out.



Prevent undesirable visitors

- Make sure your garbage cans have lids.
- If you like to eat outdoors, don't leave any food scraps on the table.
- Install screens on all your windows.

Watch for nests but DON'T EVER TOUCH ONE!



Wasp nest suspended from eaves.

What happens if you find a wasp or bumble bee nest?

Stay away from it. Don't bother the occupants. Just keep a close eye on it to see what's going on.

Early in **the spring**, the young queen leaves her winter shelter and goes looking for an appropriate location to start a colony. Once she finds a site, she builds a nest and begins laying eggs. At this point the nest is still quite small and easy to dispose of.

Over **the summer**, the population grows and there are more comings and goings all the time. As the larvae grow into workers, they leave the nest to look for food for the new larvae. Now it is harder and riskier to get rid of the nest.

If you spot a wasp or bumble bee nest in **the fall**, however, you can relax. This season marks the end of the colony's life cycle. Only the young queens survive, to keep the species going. But they have most likely already left to overwinter somewhere else.

Take care!

Destroying a nest by yourself, plugging it up or using the wasp traps sold in stores is always risky. Follow the manufacturer's instructions to the letter. Better yet, call in professional exterminators. If the nest is on public or private property, report it to the municipality or the owner.

Someone got stung? STAY CALM and follow these instructions.



Reassure the victim.
Act quickly.
If necessary, call **911**.

Examine the area around the sting.

In most cases, there will be redness, pain, itching and swelling around the site of the sting. This is a normal reaction. Even if it looks very worrying, it will disappear within a few hours or days. Apply cold compresses and use medication (acetaminophen) to control the pain. If the local reaction should spread or be accompanied by fever or local infection, see a doctor.

When should you be worried?

The reaction is abnormal and worrisome if it occurs anywhere other than the site of the sting. A swollen face, a rash all over the body, a changed voice, difficulty swallowing or breathing, an asthma attack, weakness, persistent

vomiting, loss of consciousness or shock are all signs of a serious reaction. This may occur within just a few minutes of the sting and can put the victim's life in danger. If the victim shows one or more of these symptoms, act quickly. Administer an EpiPen® (available at a pharmacy without a prescription) and an antihistamine (Benadryl®) and get to the closest emergency clinic. If necessary, call **911**.

People who have had an allergic reaction following a wasp or bee sting have a 60% chance of a similar or worse reaction if they are stung again by the same kind of insect. If you have ever noticed any signs of an allergic reaction after an insect sting, talk it over with your doctor.

There is actually a treatment available to desensitize you to bee or wasp venom, and it's 97% effective. If you have ever had a strong reaction following an insect sting, consult an allergist.



Solitary Wasps and bees

Many wasps and most bees belong to so-called solitary species, meaning that they do not live in colonies. There are no queens or worker bees, just males and females. Although these insects can sting to defend themselves, they are not quick to do so and have little interest in human food



Leafcutter



Bumble bee



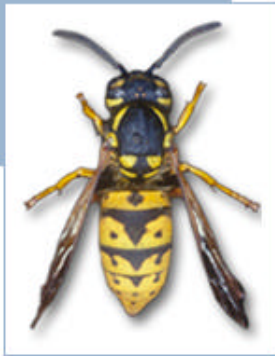
Paper wasp



Halictid bee

Learn the difference between...

A WASP



Social wasps make “paper” nests, either in clear sight or hidden underground or in a wall. Watch out for these wasps - they like to check out plates and garbage cans, and are quick to sting if disturbed.

- Slender shape
- Narrow waist
- Smooth body (little hair)
- Long legs
- Length: 10 to 25 mm
- A wasp can sting many times, because its stinger is smooth.

A HONEY BEE



Honey bees usually live in hives. They are not interested in human food and rarely sting.

- Rounded shape
- Waist not very visible
- Hairy body
- Pollen baskets on legs
- Length: 12 mm (worker)
- A honey bee stings only once and then dies. Its stinger is barbed, so the bee can't pull it out again.

A BUMBLE BEE

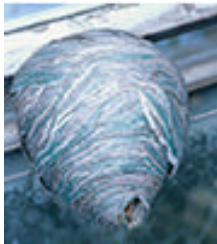


Bumble bees forage among flowers and aren't attracted by human food. They are unlikely to sting unless their nest is disturbed.

- Stocky shape
- Waist not very visible
- Very hairy body (furry-looking)
- Pollen baskets on legs
- Length: 6 to 25 mm
- A bumble bee can sting many times, because its stinger is smooth.

A wasp

Of all the species of wasps in Quebec, only about twenty are social insects. These wasps make “paper” nests for the colony by chewing wood fibre and mixing it with their saliva to make a pulp.



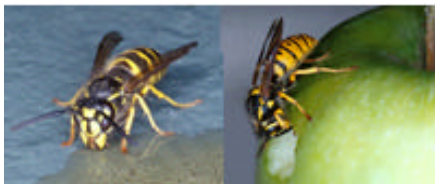
A hornet nest

Hornets (*Dolichovespula*)

Bald-faced hornets, *Dolichovespula maculata*, are easy to recognize, with their beige or ivory spots. They rarely take an interest in human food and do not usually sting.

Yellow jackets (*Vespula*)

Keep an eye out for two very similar-looking species, with black and bright yellow colouring. They're real scavengers, who like to check out our plates and garbage cans, and are quick to sting when disturbed. And they build their nest in an existing cavity—a hole abandoned by a rodent, a dip in the ground, an opening in a wall, etc. Because the nest is hidden, there's a greater risk of someone stepping on it!



German yellow jacket

Common yellow jacket

Paper wasps (*Polistes*)



A paper wasp

Black and yellow or reddish-brown and very slender, paper wasps are not usually interested in human food and are not quick to sting. They make a little aerial nest shaped like an upside-down umbrella, which they suspend from a branch or under eaves.

A honey bee



A honey bee, *Apis Mellifera*

There are many species of bees in Quebec. Most of them are solitary, but the best known, honey bees, are social insects. Honey bees have fascinating habits. They are happy to build their beeswax nests in man-made hives.

Honey bees in both rural and urban environments rarely sting and are not attracted by human food. They forage from flower to flower and harvest great quantities of nectar that they turn into honey to sustain the hive over the winter.

Colonies of honey bees live several years and can start a new colony by swarming. If you ever see a swarm, don't disturb it. Contact the local authorities.



A beekeeper working on a hive. Each comb in the nest is made of thousands of hexagonal cells, containing bee brood and food store.



Workers exchanging food.

A bumble bee

There are some twenty species of bumble bees in Quebec, all of them social. The queen makes her nest in different types of cavities, most often underground, like an abandoned rodent's hole or at the base of a wall. The nest consists of little potshaped beeswax cells.



Nest of the frisky bumble bee
Bombus impatiens

Bumble bees forage among flowers and aren't attracted by human food. They are very unlikely to sting unless their nest is disturbed.



Frisky bumble bees are common in urban areas. Bumble bees are usually black and yellow like this one, but some species are even orangish.

Lots of other insects hurt, too!

Mosquitoes, black flies, no-see-ums, deerflies and other insects that feed on blood can hurt, too. Some of them, especially black flies and deerflies, can also cause an allergic reaction. Mosquitoes, fortunately, cause only local reactions.



Mosquito

Deerfly

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO KNOW MORE...

Some sites to browse

Montréal Insectarium
www.ville.montreal.qc.ca/insectarium

Hôpital Sainte-Justine
www.hsj.qc.ca

Would you like some copies of the *Don't Get Stung!* brochure?

Contact the Publication Department
of Hôpital Sainte-Justine
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Page layout : Marie-Eve Fortier

Photos : © Insectarium de Montréal,
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