

# Yellow jacket wasp

---



Yellow jackets are important predators of pest insects.

Yellow jackets are often called "bees" as they are similar in size and appearance, and both sting, but are actually wasps. A typical yellow jacket worker is about 12 mm (0.5 in) long, with alternating bands on the abdomen; the queen is larger, about 19 mm (0.75 in) long (the different patterns on the abdomen help separate various species). Workers are sometimes confused with honey bees, especially when flying in and out of their nests. Yellow jackets, in contrast to honey bees, are not covered with tan-brown dense hair on their bodies; they do not carry pollen and do not have the flattened hairy hind legs used to carry it. They have a lance-like stinger with small barbs and typically sting repeatedly,<sup>[1]</sup> though occasionally the stinger becomes lodged and pulls free of the wasp's body; the venom, like most bee and wasp venoms, is primarily only dangerous to humans if allergic, unless a victim is stung many times (*main article: Bee sting*). All species have yellow or white on the face. Mouthparts are well-developed with strong mandibles for capturing and chewing insects, with a proboscis for sucking nectar, fruit, and other juices. Yellow jackets build nests in trees, shrubs, or in protected places such as inside human-made structures (attics, hollow walls or flooring, in sheds, under porches, and eaves of houses), or in soil cavities, mouse burrows, etc. They build them from wood fiber they chew into a paper-like pulp.



Many other insects exhibit protective mimicry of aggressive, stinging yellow jackets; in addition to numerous bees and wasps, the list includes some flies, moths, and beetles.

Yellow jackets' closest relatives, the hornets, closely resemble them but have a much bigger head, seen especially in the large distance from the eyes to the back of the head.

Yellow jackets are social hunters living in colonies containing workers, queens, and males. Colonies are annual with only inseminated queens overwintering. Fertilized queens occur in protected places such as hollow logs, in stumps, under bark, in leaf litter, in soil cavities, and human-made structures. Queens emerge during the warm days of late spring or early summer, select a nest site, and build a small paper nest in which they lay eggs. After eggs hatch from the 30 to 50 brood cells, the queen feeds the young larvae for about 18 to 20 days. After that, the workers in the colony will take over caring for the larvae, feeding them with chewed up food, meat or fruit. Larvae pupate emerge later as small, infertile females called workers. By mid-summer, the first adult workers emerge and assume the tasks of nest expansion, foraging for food, care of the queen and larvae, and colony defense.