

Yellow Jackets



Yellow jacket drinking soda.



Small yellow jacket nest.



Typical bald-faced hornet nest.

Yellow jackets are social wasps that build large, hidden nests. The nests are usually subterranean in rodent burrows or in cavities in trees, walls or attics.

Yellow jacket nests can be huge with 50,000 to 100,000 workers. In temperate climates these colonies are annual. Their nests die in the fall after producing new queens. New queens produced by the colonies in the fall spend the winter in protected places until spring when they found new colonies. Yellow jacket colonies can become perennial in warmer climates, such as in Hawaii. In these situations the nests can become enormous, with millions of workers!

Yellow jacket nests can be distinguished from paper wasp nests because the brood cells are encased in a paper envelope so they can't be seen without taking off the outer envelope.

These wasps generally feed on live prey, but the pest species, such as *pensylvanica*, will scavenge other sources of meat and sugar, including sodas, hamburgers and road kill. They will also visit aphids and scale insects on trees and shrubs for honeydew.

The western yellow jacket, *Vespula pensylvanica*, and to a lesser extent the German yellow jacket, *Vespula germanica* are major pests in California and other parts of the world where they've been introduced. They can be separated by the complete yellow eye ring in *pensylvanica* and incomplete one in *germanica*.



Western yellow jacket.



European yellow jacket.

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