

Paper Wasps



European paper wasp nest hidden in fence. Photo by LS Kimsey.



European paper wasp with workers. Photo by Kathy Garvey.

Paper wasps in the genera *Polistes* and *Mischocyttarus* build open faced nests, with the cells exposed. Nests are built out of fibers the wasps collect from plants and mix with saliva. They are commonly located under eaves and in other protected sites. Even large nests rarely have more than 30 workers and one queen. These are all annual nests. They are founded in the spring and die in the fall. Newly mated young queens leave their nests in the fall to find a sheltered place to spend the winter; emerging in the spring to begin a new nest.

Paper wasps only feed on live insects, such as caterpillars and bugs. They do not scavenge in garbage or at picnics, like some of the yellowjacket species will do.

These wasps are not particularly aggressive in California. However, they will defend their nests and this is where you are most likely to get stung. If nests need to be removed, this should be done at night

A number of features separate *Mischocyttarus* wasps from *Polistes*, but the elongate petiole is the most distinctive feature. *Mischocyttarus* have a longer, slenderer petiole or first abdominal segment than *Polistes*.

The European paper wasp, *Polistes dominula*, is the only Paper wasp in the U.S. with black and yellow coloration and a large yellow spot on the second abdominal segment. It will build nests in any small above ground cavity or protected flat surface. They particularly like Spanish-style curved tile roofs.

This wasp will also build nests behind the mirror of side view mirrors of cars and trucks.



European paper wasp..

Mischocyttarus paper wasp.



Native paper wasp queen founding a new nest.