



Beekeeping Insect Note 15

Reducing the Likelihood of Stings During Outdoor Activities

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The advent of warm weather is the time for outdoor fun and yard work. Picnicking, swimming, golfing, tennis, gardening and lawn mowing are just a few of the activities people engage in when the weather is pleasant.

But no one likes to be stung by an insect and for the 3-5 percent of the population who are allergic to an insect sting, such an event could be life-threatening. There are only a few types of insects which cause most of the problems. With the proper knowledge and precautions, the likelihood of being stung can be greatly reduced.

Social wasps such as yellow jackets, hornets, and paper wasps can be very sensitive to vibrations and very defensive of their nests. These nests, made of "paper" can be located underground, hanging from trees, or under protected areas. Though the nests are started anew each spring, the populations of insects build to substantial numbers by mid-summer. These nests should be avoided or eradicated with an aerosol hornet and wasp pesticide if located in a troublesome area. These insects are generally not aggressive unless they or their nests are threatened.

Most types of bees are not highly defensive and mean no more harm than does a fly. Notably, however, are the social bees such as honey bees and bumble bees which can be quite defensive around a nest, but under other circumstances have no desire to sting.

During picnicking, hiking, or other activities, you may be at greater risk to be stung as you place yourself in greater proximity with insects. Avoiding nests, being aware, and remaining calm are your best strategies. To help avoid being stung, the following suggestions should be useful:

- When hiking, wear boots or proper footwear.

- Avoid perfume, cologne, hair spray, suntan lotion or other fragrances that might attract curious insects.
- Wear dull tan or white clothing which is not baggy and which could trap an insect inside.
- Standard repellants are not effective against stinging insects.
- When picnicking, keep all food covered except during mealtime (this applies to sweets and meats). Pay special attention to open soft drink containers and glasses to be sure there are no "visitors" on or in the vessel before you take a drink.
- Do not eat or rest too near trash bins. Food debris will be a major attraction to some of these insects, especially in autumn.
- If an insect lands on you or your food, do not become alarmed. They are only investigating or foraging. Blow or gently brush the insect away. DO NOT swat or wave at the insect. Slow movement is best.
- Scout out the area for nests or potential problems before you choose that "perfect" spot to picnic or rest.

NOTE: These insects are beneficial either as pollinators (bees) or in consuming other insects. Do not destroy them unnecessarily. They will not sting without cause. If you are stung, the best treatment is to remove the stinger (if present) and apply an ice pack. If you are allergic to a particular stinging insect, carry an epinephrine kit with you or have immediate access to one. See your doctor!