

PEST WASPS

Paper wasps – *Polistes chinensis* and *Polistes humilis*

Common and German wasps – *Vespula* wasp species (aka yellow jackets)

Why are they a problem?

The two main types of introduced wasps in New Zealand are the paper wasps and the *Vespula* wasps. They threaten human health, safety and recreation, cost us millions of dollars a year in economic losses, and have a large negative impact on our biodiversity. Wasps prey on an extraordinary amount of native insects and honeydew which would usually be feeding our native birds and other wildlife. They have even been reported to attack newly-hatched birds. In New Zealand they unfortunately have no natural predators, and with our mild climate, their populations able to exponentially increase each breeding season.

What kind of wasp have I seen?

Not all wasps you may see are the invaders and a problem. New Zealand has many kinds of native wasps and bees that have evolved here (somewhere between 2000-3000 kinds!). Most of them are tiny and perform important services in the ecosystem, including pollination and keeping other insects controlled naturally. They are not naturally aggressive to humans.



^ left to right: Asian paper, paper wasp nest, Australian paper wasp, Common wasp, German wasp (photo by Phil Bendle)

Invader 1: Paper wasps are narrow bodied and build a papery nest from dry plant fiber mixed with their saliva. They prefer life in the open, in cities, suburban gardens, scrub and open farmland. They have a tendency to set up home under your house eaves, steps and fences where they can cause your family and pets harm. Both species have an obvious 'waist' between abdomen and wings.

Invader 2: Common and German wasps (*Vespula* wasps) pose the greatest risk to people and the environment. Both these species live underground with often more than one entrance holes (sometimes found in hollow trees too). They establish large colonies, which can contain thousands of individuals. They are highly aggressive towards creatures that approach their nests so a great degree of caution is advised! These wasps are larger and more brightly coloured in yellow and black than other wasps. Queens overwinter and survive to establish new colonies, while sufficiently large colonies can survive the winter and cause devastation earlier in the year.

What to do if you or someone is stung

- If you are stung in or near the mouth/throat or know you are anaphylactic to wasp stings, **tell someone immediately** and let them know your location. Seek medical advice as soon as possible. Always carry an EpiPen if you are anaphylactic
- Take an antihistamine tablet or apply antihistamine cream (available at pharmacy).

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- Apply a cold compress to relieve pain (don't put ice directly on the skin however) for at least 15-20 minutes.
- Applying a paste of baking soda and a drop of water to the sting can help, as can vinegar.

See [this first aid sheet](#) for more detail on what to do (Landcare Research)

If you see a wasp nest in a public reserve

Immediately contact the Auckland Council Contact Centre on (09) 301 0101. They will send someone out to remove it. Ensure you give a precise location of the nest (street address, type of tree it is in, location, how far along a track and a photo if possible) when lodging the request for help.

If you find a wasp nest on private property

move away, stay well clear of the swarm and notify the owner. It is the property owner's responsibility to remove the wasp nest. The council can unfortunately not remove nests from private property. Treating wasp nests isn't too difficult if you have the right equipment, however never put yourself at risk if you are not confident or prepared.

Local beekeepers dislike wasps with a vengeance and may offer to help you treat a common or german wasps you find. On that note, if you find a bee swarm, we recommend contacting a [local bee hive keeper](#) as they are usually more than willing to collect and re-home them.

How to control pest wasps

Paper wasps: In the evening when they are less active, cover and protect yourself before dousing their nest (and adults on the nest) with a product like WaspJetPro or if you must, fly spray - although this poses risks to nearby insects too. Make a hasty retreat. Repeat until the nest is empty, then collect, crush and dispose of the paper nest (wearing gloves).

Common and German wasps:

OPTION 1: VESPEX - Long term, wide benefiting, least-environmentally damaging option: Vespex is a bait designed specifically for *Vespula* wasp species without the need to find nests and risk other insects including the honey bee. Vespex is a protein based bait which adults collect from bait stations and carry back to the nest, where it quickly kills the whole colony. Vespex is available for sale to persons residing in New Zealand and who are registered with Merchanto Ltd as approved users. Specific rules regulate the use of this control method. Please visit this website for more information: <https://www.merchanto.com/vespex.html>

Vespex is generally used between January to April when wasps are actively looking for protein. Community groups looking after reserves or large tracts of private land are the most likely to use Vespex as it has a large treatment area. Get in touch with Pest Free Kaipatiki if you are interested in incorporating a Wasp control component into your own restoration programme.

OPTION 2: Quick, one off kill of a nest: Wearing protective clothing (such as long sleeved clothing, pants, gloves and a hat or bee-veil) use a store bought insecticide such as *Dust2Dust*. Use this permethrin-based insecticide at the amount as directed on the back of the product, to blow the dust into the wasp nest entrances (and some 5cm around each hole). Do this in a targeted way so the powder does not drift anywhere else. Do this on a fine and sunny spell of weather in either early morning or late afternoon when wasp activity is lowest. If you use the recommended amount, this should kill the entire colony. Always use and store insecticides as recommended on the product.

OPTION 3: A temporary solution to generally reduce the amount of wasps in the environment (but will not kill a colony). An 'organic' trap can be made at home out of old plastic bottles, where a sugary water solution can be used to entice and trap wasps. You must however take care to use a good recipe that also includes vinegar as otherwise it will kill honeybees too!. Browse the internet for variations of recipes, some include jam, beer, yeast, vinegar, banana skins, meat (between Jan-April) and a few other things too. This is a temporary solution you can try at home.

Let's give our birds, insects and picnic-tables a bit of a break – control those wasps!

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