

News Article
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Doing Battle with Carpenter Bees

This is the time of year I begin getting calls on carpenter bees, which are often mistaken for bumblebees. The large bees tend to hover around houses and other wooden structures when searching for mates and nesting sites. Sometimes adults and children worry about being stung by these bees, but the chances of being stung are very slim.

The males are the most obvious to people as they hover and dart around houses and structures, however, the males do not have stingers and only look menacing. You can recognize a male by the white spot on their face. The females can sting but won't usually unless handled.

Carpenter bees can cause damage to structures over time. But they also provide a benefit in that they are also an important pollinator. If you walk through a home garden or even some row crop fields, you will find them foraging — gathering nectar and pollen and in the process pollinating the flowers. The problem with carpenter bees is that the females like to bore tunnels into wood for nest cavities. However, she does not actually ingest the wood. Carpenter bees find bare, unpainted or weathered softwood very attractive. Once inside the holes the females lay their eggs and this is where the larvae grow and develop. The nest provides a safe haven for the females and the larvae and so you must treat with a long lasting insecticide.

Common methods are injecting an insecticide into the tunnels or puffing dust insecticides into the holes. Using an applicator like a hand duster can help ensure the products gets deeper into the tunnel. After using either method, seal the tunnels using caulk or cork. Sealing their mines without pesticides can help, but isn't permanent. Carpenter bee control can be done at any time of the year.

The question is sometimes asked about painting the wood. Actually even newly applied latex paint does not seem to slow them down. They may also bore through varnish, stain and just about any type of wood, even treated lumber. However, spraying a pyrethroid-type insecticides (1 ounce per gallon) works well on most wood surfaces (1 gallon per 500 to 1000 square feet). This is effective for treating cedar homes and log cabins. For more information, visit the Extension Web site at www.aces.edu