



The Buzz on Carpenter Bees

Across the state, people are confronting one of spring's most annoying insects, carpenter bees. An entomologist with the Alabama Cooperative Extension System says the large bees tend to hover around houses and other wooden structures when searching for mates and nesting sites.

"Adults and children alike often worry about being stung by these bees," says Dr. Xing Ping Hu. "But the chances of being stung are slim."

She says the males, which are more obvious to people as they hover and dart around structures, do not have stingers.

"The males, which have a white spot on their face, will confront you when you enter their territory but you can just ignore them," explains Hu. "The females can sting but won't usually unless handled."

She notes that with declining populations of wild honeybees the carpenter bee, which is one of the largest bees, is becoming 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," says Hu.

She says for most people the bigger problem with carpenter bees is that the females bore tunnels into wood.

"Carpenter bees find bare, unpainted or weathered softwood very attractive," Hu says. "Females, which are boring or hanging around looking for a place to bore, and the eggs and larvae in those holes, are harder to kill. You must treat the nest with a longer lasting insecticide."

Common methods are injecting an insecticide into the tunnels or puffing dust insecticides into holes. Using an applicator like a hand duster can help ensure the products gets deeper into the tunnel.

Hu says after using either method, seal the tunnels using caulk or cork.

“Sealing their mines without pesticides can help, but isn't permanent,” she says.

The most important reminder Hu has for homeowners is that carpenter bee control can be done at any time of year.

“Do not wait until the bees start hovering around in spring. Try to get ahead of the game.”

She adds that 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. However, spraying pyrethroid-type insecticides (1 ounce per gallon) works well on wood surfaces (1 gallon per 500 to 1000 square feet). This is effective for treating cedar homes and log cabins.”

She encourages home owners with a serious infestation to contact a professional pesticide company. They have tools that hold more of the dust insecticide and can reach a longer distance.

For more information on carpenter bees, visit the Extension Web site at www.aces.edu and do a search for carpenter bees. You can also visit the Lauderdale County Extension office on Veterans Drive in Florence or call 766-6223.