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News Release

## Digger Wasp

Question: Large wasps are hovering by the hundreds over my lawn. Do you know what they are doing and if they are aggressive? There are so many I am afraid to mow the lawn or walk around the yard?

Answer: These wasps are sometimes called digger wasp (*Scolia dubia*). They are slender and about 3/4 inch long. Digger wasps are easily recognized by their flight and nesting behavior. They fly over the lawn during the day looking for grubs. Because they kill the grubs, they are considered a beneficial insect. When a digger wasp finds a grub, it paralyzes it, digs a chamber in the soil, and lays an egg on the grub. The soil that is dug for the chamber appears on the lawn as a fist-sized mound. There can be a few mounds to hundreds of mounds in a lawn, depending on the severity of the grub problem. The wasp larva that emerges uses the grub as food. These wasps generally do not attack people and are usually seen flying low over lawns in the afternoon in search of their prey.

While these wasps are able to sting, they are not aggressive and normally will not sting people unless handled or stepped upon. Unfortunately they won't completely control problems caused by white grubs, but they provide some natural suppression and should be conserved if possible.

Another pest you may see entering and exiting the ground is yellow jackets (*Vespula* spp.). They can be very dangerous and there have been reports of extremely large nest in the southeast. No one knows quite why the nests are so large but they can be extremely difficult and dangerous to kill.

When stung, some people experience severe pain, localized swelling, and redness. Other people may experience a systemic reaction such as respiratory problems, swelling beyond the sting, nausea, anaphylactic shock, or even death in very rare instances. If you experience any of these systemic symptoms, go to a medical facility immediately.

Yellow jackets are about 1/2 to 3/4 inch long and have black and yellow bands on their thoraxes and abdomens. They usually ground nest in areas such as old rodent burrows, beneath landscape timbers and heavy mulch, or in rock walls. They may also be found in the wall voids of homes, outbuildings and even abandoned cars. The colony of yellow jackets can grow to thousands of individuals by the end of summer, peaking in August or September.

As the yellow jacket's natural food supply begins to decrease during the fall, they tend to become more of a problem to humans. As the weather cools, we tend to picnic outdoors a little more. Yellow jackets will not hesitate to feed on our picnic foods (hot dogs, hamburgers, melons and soda) in order to fulfill their dietary needs for protein and carbohydrates. Yellow jackets can also become a problem around dumpsters and trash cans at public facilities.

For control, locate the nest during the day, if possible, and mark its location. Do your treatment at night. Do not shine a flashlight directly at the nest because you may startle the yellow jackets and they may go to the light.

Use a dust formulation or at least 1 gallon of a liquid insecticide labeled for yellow jacket control, and then thoroughly drench the nest. We recommend that you wear full protective clothing including a long-sleeved shirt, long pants, gloves, and a bee veil when attempting control. I like to wear the heavy zip up coveralls and I tie off the ankles and wrist. The last ones I killed I also wore a paint gun face mask with a hooded jacket tied tightly around the mask. If you suspect you have one of these gigantic nest with multiple entrances you may want to hire a pest control professional to treat the nest.