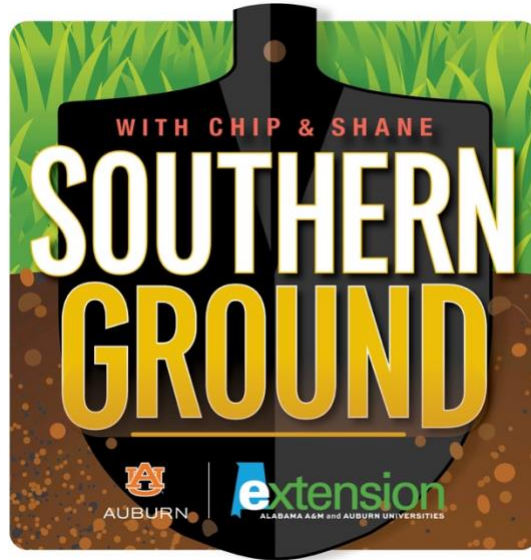




Season 1 Episode 21—Yellow Jackets & Hornets: Part 2

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Announcer

Welcome to the *Southern Ground* podcast provided by Alabama Extension through Auburn University. Extension educators Shane Harris and Dr. Chip East discuss seasonal lawn and garden topics, address common questions, and provide the practical solutions you want to know. Let's dig in to our southern ground.

Shane Harris

Hello everyone, and welcome to another episode of *Southern Ground*. I'm Shane Harris and joining me is Dr. Chip East as well as Dr. Meredith Shrader. We're going to continue our conversation on yellow jackets, and we're going to pick up with hornets.

Chip, I just recently saw a bunch of European hornets on a home visit. And they're amazing. Large, one of our largest hornets in the wasp family. So, tell us a little bit about the hornets we have. We have the bald-faced hornet and the European hornet. When you have a problem or if you have a hive nearby and they are a little aggressive or of a concern, people want to know what to do with them.

Meredith Shrader

Yes. And the bald-faced hornets are the ones that build the paper nests that are the size of basketballs up in the trees. And sometimes they do choose poorly and will choose bushes or crape myrtles that are a little bit lower hanging. The ones that are up out of the way. I just ignore those. They don't they don't reuse those nests, so that's not too bad.

But if they're in the bushes, they're a little bit harder to deal with. If you're concerned about a high traffic area with the bald-faced hornets, you can use that spray, the targeted stand back 12 feet. Just be aware that they will come bubbling up at you. And that's why you're paying for that propellant to go 12 feet. So, please stay the 12 recommended distance and have an exit strategy just in case you do get tagged. But most of the time those are fairly calm Individuals, unless you say, hey guys, watch this. Hilarity ensues for YouTube viewers. But, for you or your buddy, that's not the best thing to go messing with them.

Shane Harris

I think of all the cartoons we grew up watching in the '70s and '80s. Tip, that, you know, those Bugs Bunny cartoons and all that running away or messing with the hornet's nest and all that. So those all come to a visual as we talk about these hornets and wasp.

Chip East

One time, Shane, I was using a poll saw, which you are having a bad day when you use a pole saw in the first place, they're heavy and aggravating. I was cutting a limb, just a cutting, just a cutting, this limb, that limb. I cut a limb, it dropped down onto, I was above the hornet's nest. I didn't see the hornet's nest. I cut the limb, the limb came down, split the hornet's nest wide open. And I just want to tell you, Meredith, just so y'all know, that is not a management practice to get. That doesn't get rid of hornets by splitting the nest open. They don't like it one bit.

Shane Harris

You told me earlier, you're a runner, so you did have to run fast that day.

Chip East

I left the saw on the ground and ran.

Meredith Shrader

Yep, you've seen Bolt. Had nothing on you that day, you were inspired.

Shane Harris

That was before YouTube. So, there's no video of you doing that out there now?

Chip East

No, no video. That hadn't been that many years ago either, when that happened.

Shane Harris

Won't reenact that.

Chip East

No.

Shane Harris

The European hornets now they're a little different because they're active during the day, but they're also active at night. And the European hornets are the larger hornets that a lot of people see around their floodlights, night lights, on the porch. But these are large sort of menacing hornets. And they tend to be in a hollow tree. But they can also build nests in some various places.

Meredith Shrader

Yes. And they are very large and impressive. And whenever I start discussing them, I always have a disclaimer that this is the one that you want to spend the money to have somebody else take the risk. So, these other little guys, like the bald-faced hornets, the yellow jackets, there is a risk reward there with the price tag involved.

But these guys pay the money to have somebody come out and professionally remove these because they're big, there's a lot of them. They don't get into the thousands, but there can be several hundred individuals. They continue to be active during the day and the night. So, there's no real way to sneak up on them, and deal with them.

I've had people that had these in their RVs because they parked them in a spot and they get into people's sheds, homes. They're just really advantageous. They like sap. So, you can often see them, around oak trees that are having the ooze come out of them. And so, they like that resource, but they can definitely be one of the ones that you want to avoid. This is an avoid one.

Chip East

Finding the nest, to me, is the hard part. So, when you see one at your house, they're coming to a porch light. And then if we had a yellow porch light, does that help? Rather than a lighter color.

Meredith Shrader

The yellowy tint. It's just not as bright as what you want it's something that, the brighter it is, the more it attracts things. But some people use like a blue porch light or a red porch light. So a lot of times that's the only time you see it. And so, if that's the only time you notice them and you're not seeing them around your trees or things, That's the situation where I just turn my porch light out for, for a little bit and maybe use your light on your phone. If you know, you're going to be out, just turn it on in those occasions. But these guys, I'm not going to go hunt for them.

Shane Harris

It's best to just leave them alone in their natural area and only take the control options to do something about them if they're around the human activity.

Meredith Shrader

Yes. That definitely, even if they're kind of out of the way a little bit but somebody has a reaction to the venom of the bees and things. Or, if you have curious dogs that might not stay away, that would be when I would take action. But yes, most of the time, unless they're right near you, I give them a good grace period.

You can put up maybe some tape or let people know that they're there. They can be aggressive. When you get really close to them, these guys, they're so large and they know they're bad guys. So they have the confidence to let things get a little closer. So you can stumble upon them accidentally and not get tagged.

But, if you see them just be aware and stay away because they do have a very large, powerful, stinger that can go through clothing, bee suits, leather gloves if they get wet, they'll readily sting through that.

Shane Harris

Best to leave them alone because they're defensive if you get in their area, their territory. They don't want to stay unless they have to.

Meredith Shrader

Yes, they will defend their nest with all they got.

Chip East

Dr. Shrader, do the bald-face hornets and the European hornets overwinter similar to how you described the yellow jackets?

Meredith Shrader

They do a lot of the vespids, the wasps, yellow jackets, hornets. They produce all those boys and girls, and they will have the queens, the mated queens, and they will go and overwinter. And so, yes, each year your European hornet, your bald faced hornets, everything starts with a single individual that year, that spring.

And so that's why sometimes when you see a hornet that's building that first cup nest, you can see it. It's really intricate with the paper and the way they kind of start with that first bell shaped upside down, bell shape with the hornets nest. That's one individual doing all that work. So yes, it starts from a single overwintered queen each year.

And so, if you can take out that queen and that nest then that's it, she's done. That's how they start each year. And they're doing that under the eaves in barns and trees. And they really do prefer to be out kind of in trees and kind of sheltered areas. But we've provided a nice little resource for them sometimes in the eaves of our houses.

Chip East

Once we see them around the home, it's hard to know. Finding that nest is tough because they'll fly, I assume, as far as they need to go to get what they need. So, you can't say, well, that nest is within 50 yards of here, 100 yards of here. And if you're in the woods, finding that nest is tough. It's hard to treat when you can't find it.

Meredith Shrader

Yes. And a lot of times the only time you see them is when they're around an oak tree or a tree that has the ooze or the flux, the sugary sap flowing from them. Ignorance is bliss. So, what I do, what I don't know, won't hurt me. So when I see a European hornet, I go, oh, that's really impressive. And you're around here somewhere but you're not where I am most of the time. So, we're just going to coexist and look at you and take some photos and tell my friends that I saw one.

Chip East

That's good advice.

Shane Harris

They're okay if they're not bothering me, is when they come into the human activity around where we people are, are they begin to come and get territorial and aggressive. That's when you want to take some steps to control.

Chip East

Do we control those or manage those similar to the yellowjacket? If we find their nest, we can treat their nest.

Meredith Shrader

Yes. The European hornet likes cavities, it's kind of a cavity dweller. And so that's why when they got in that person's RV, they were in kind of one of those storage boxes that hadn't been closed very well. And that's a perfect place for them or in between slats on a barn, or wood pallets, or somewhere where they had an opportunity to build a nest.

Those guys, since they're cavities, you can't do the drown method. So, if you have European hornets, I always say this is when you can call, spend the money. Spend the money on the professionals. But if you want to take them on or if you have a bee suit or you have something that's fairly impregnable, but again, they can sting through bee suits.

If you want to take the risk yourself and spend \$30 on two, not one can. It's going to be this is going to be a multi can endeavor of spray. Use the foam, so they have to dig, climb their way out of the poisonous foam. That's the only thing that I would try to do if you really were in a tight spot.

Shane Harris

You mentioned cold weather and that actually will kill the yellow jackets, the wasp, and the

hornets. How cold does it have to be for that existing, nest? Hornet's nest hanging up in the tree, in the cavity, in the barn, the yellowjacket nest in the ground. How cold does it have to get? Because we know even the temperature of the ground Chip is much warmer than the air temperature. So, is there a certain degrees that it has to get down to actually have a killing of that particular colony?

Meredith Shrader

Yes. Especially here in the South, it does take a little longer. You can go into October and November, before these nests will stop being active. They've stopped reproducing now, they're not the sun cues have changed. They're not actively reproducing, but there's still individuals left in that nest. And so, I would give it at least until the end of October, Thanksgiving in some places before to go and look at, revisit where that nest was.

Shane Harris

So likely multiple freezes.

Meredith Shrader

Yeah, I would say maybe a good hard frost. The ground has to be cold again. Like you said, that it's insulated. But the ground temps really need to get below 50 degrees. Before they start to slowly die off. So, there is an age limit too, the workers are not programmed to overwinter. So, they will die depending on when they were emerged as adults. It might if it's a really late emerging adult, say late August, October, late, it. It'll take a little bit.

Chip East

I will warn you one thing. We thought it had gotten cold enough. And there's no, in this case, bald faced hornets in this nest. We cut that off. It was close to the ground. We cut it, brought it inside. As they warmed up, they started coming back out of that nest.

Meredith Shrader

Yeah, yeah. But again it's that temperature that they will wake up that it has to be below 50 degrees for an extended period before they finally shut down. So, but yes, you can even today you could go outside and grab a hornet or something and put it in the refrigerator for a little bit and it start shutting down and slowing down. And you can bring it out and but yeah, when it starts warming up, it'll wake up.

Shane Harris

But we've done that with our entomology classes over the years. Had a bug collection and try to freeze them so we can pin them and then get them back out, and those things start wiggling again. So that's a little bit of shockers, like even in the freezer for several hours, but you're still not dead. Dr. Schrader, we want to thank you for being with us on this two-part episode of *Southern Ground*. We've talked about the different wasps and hornets that we have out there, and we want you all to be careful out there in the fall when they get a little aggressive. And we want you to take the correct actions to control them if necessary.

Chip East

You've been listening to *Southern Ground* with Chip, Shane, and today, Dr. Meredith Shrader. Thank you so much for joining us today.

Meredith Shrader

Thank you.

Shane Harris

If you have any other information you might need, reach out to the Alabama Cooperative Extension System here at Auburn University or any land-grant university, nationwide. If you need help with any kind of gardening questions or just want to look up more information about how to control yellow jackets and hornets around your property, reach out to your local Extension office. We thank you all for listening to another episode of *Southern Ground*.

Announcer

Southern Ground has been a production of Alabama Extension at Auburn University.