



Note 1.08
(Previously Note #15)

Reducing the Likelihood of Stings During Outdoor Activities

With the arrival of spring and warm weather comes the time for outdoor fun and yard work. Picnicking, swimming, golfing, tennis, gardening and lawn mowing are just a few of the activities people engage in when the weather is pleasant.

As with people, this change in climate ushers in a period of greater activity by wildlife, including insects. Most animals present no threat to people or their pets and in the case of bird watching and similar interests, are often the focus of outdoor activities. Unfortunately, some stinging insects also are plentiful during this time and can be a nuisance. For as many as 5% of the population who are allergic to insect stings, these insects may pose a very serious health hazard. With the proper knowledge and precautions, the likelihood of being stung can be greatly reduced.

Social wasps such as yellow jackets, hornets and paper wasps are very sensitive to vibrations and very defensive of their nests. These nests, made of "paper" can be located underground, hanging from trees or under protected areas. Though the nests are started anew each spring, the populations of insects builds to substantial numbers by mid-summer. These nests should be avoided or eradicated with an aerosol hornet & wasp pesticide if located in a troublesome area. These insects are generally not aggressive unless they or their nests are threatened or disturbed.

Fire ants are known for their painful stings, and the establishment of these ants in North Carolina now is something with which we have to contend. Most of the time their nest mounds are easily detected and avoided. However, fire ants also will build nests that are hidden in debris or obstructed by such things as wood piles. Over-the-counter pesticides for use against fire ants are widely available, easy to use, and fairly inexpensive.

Bees are not highly defensive and mean no more harm to people, pets, and livestock than does a fly. However, social bees such as honey bees and bumble bees can build large colonies/nests, and those nests should be avoided.

During picnicking, hiking, or other activities you may be at greater risk to be stung as you place yourself in greater proximity to insects. This is particularly true in mid to late summer as the

number of insects remains high while their natural food sources become more scarce. Avoiding nests, being aware, and remaining calm are your best strategies. To avoid being stung, the following suggestions should be useful:

- Appropriate footwear will reduce or eliminate the chance of stepping on insects that sting.
- Avoid perfume, cologne, hair spray, suntan lotion, and other fragrances that might attract curious insects.
- Wear dull, light-colored clothing such as tan or white. Avoid excessively baggy clothing, as these garments can trap an insect and cause it to sting.
- Standard insect repellents work well for mosquitoes and other biting insects, but are not effective against stinging insects.
- When picnicking, keep all food covered except during mealtime. (This applies particularly to sweets and meats). Pay special attention to open soft drink containers and glasses to be sure that there are no "visitors" on or in the vessel before you take a drink.
- Do not eat or rest too close to trash bins. Food debris will be a major attractant to some of these insects, especially in late summer and autumn.
- If an insect lands on you or your food, do not become alarmed or panic. They are only investigating or foraging. Blow or gently brush the insect away. DO NOT swat or wave at the insect. Slow movement is best.
- Scout out the area for nests or potential problems before you choose that "perfect" spot to picnic or rest.

NOTE: These insects are beneficial either as pollinators (bees) or in consuming other insects (wasps and hornets). Do not destroy them unnecessarily. They will not sting without cause. If you are stung, the best treatment is to remove the stinger (if present), and apply an ice pack. If you are allergic to a particular stinging insect, carry an epinephrine kit with you or have immediate access to one. Make others in your party aware of your condition and instruct them on the proper use of the kit in case you are unable to perform the injection yourself. Refer to Beekeeping Note 1.09: Allergy to Insect Stings for additional information.

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