Note 1.10
(Previously Note #8)

CARPENTER BEES

Introduction

Carpenter bees are large, black and yellow bees often seen hovering around the eaves of a house, wooden fences, or the underside of a deck in late spring. They are most often mistaken for bumble bees, but differ in having a shiny, rather hairy, black tail section.

The carpenter bee is so-called because of its habit of excavating tunnels in wood with its strong jaws. Entrance holes are usually on the underside of a board, round and 2 inch in diameter. Sometimes a tell tale trace of coarse sawdust may be found under the hole. The holes start upward about one-half inch and then turn horizontally with the grain and may run six or seven inches or more. Occasionally several bees use the same entrance hole and have individual branches off the main tunnel. If the same entrance hole is used for several years tunnels may extend several feet in the wood.

Wooden decks and overhangs are prime targets, and although painted surfaces are less preferred, they are not immune. Unpainted or stained cedar, cypress and redwood also are attacked despite their resistant reputations. If you have a problem with carpenter bees, be sure to monitor nesting areas every year from April until mid-June and take prompt remedial action.

Biology

Each female drills a tunnel in which she gradually builds a large pollen ball on which she lays an egg. This ball is sealed off with a chewed wood partition and then additional cells are similarly provisioned until the tunnel is completely filled. Usually six to seven provisioned cells are constructed in each tunnel. Males do not drill tunnels, but are territorial and can harass other bees or people who venture into their protected areas. The males cannot sting and are distinguished from the females by a whitish spot on the front of the face. Though the females can sting, they rarely do so unless confined to your hand or are highly agitated.

Carpenter bees do not cause serious damage to wood unless large numbers are allowed to bore many tunnels in successive years. Nesting activity may be substantially reduced by treating the entrance holes with insecticide and then plugging with dowels or wood putty. Sometimes woodpeckers damage

infested wood in search of bee larvae hidden in tunnels. Since the entrance holes are usually in protected areas, water does not enter and wood decay resulting from carpenter bee damage is not usually a problem.
The bees are active nest builders from early April to mid-June. During this period they may be annoying with their buzzing, drilling or defense of territory. Yellowish brown stains also may be visible on siding below holes as they often void waste before entering the tunnel. The first bees seen in the season usually die off by early summer after nesting. Carpenter bees seen after late July are new bees and **do not tunnel** that year.

Control

Chemical control for carpenter bees is best accomplished by applying any insecticide spray or dust labeled for killing wasps or bees directly into and around the nest entrances. The holes then should be plugged with wood dowels or putty. Otherwise, tunnels may be reused year after year. Insecticides for use by homeowners include carbaryl (Sevin), chlorpyrifos (Dursban), malathion, propoxur (Baygon), resmethrin and other properly labeled pyrethroid insecticides (many ending in Amethrin@). Contact your county cooperative extension office for their latest recommendations and remember to always read the label.

The previously mentioned chemicals are relatively safe and require minimal use, but if you are reluctant to use pesticides, then non-chemical control (if practical) might be attempted by netting or swatting the bees out of the air as they hover. Sometimes plugging the hole with wire mesh at night while the bees are inside will trap it, but a resourceful insect might chew another exit.

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