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Calls to the lab this past week have been dominated by those seeking advice about eliminating wasp nests from their homes and yards. Killing off a wasp nest is tricky business because as many of us know, the occupants of these nests tend to resist any effort to kill them off by stinging the daylighters out of those attempting to do so. Wasps that are most problematic this time of year belong to the family Vespidae. Though many species of vespids lead a solitary lifestyle and rarely cause us problems, yellow jackets, bald-faced hornets and paper wasps are social insects that live in large colonies. They construct their nests in the ground, in trees, under eaves and inside wall voids and attics. Nest construction starts in late spring and continues throughout the summer. The last brood raised includes males and next year's queens and due to the importance of these reproductives, the worker wasps become very protective and aggressive toward those who venture too close to the nest this time of year.

In northern latitudes such as Michigan, social vespids nests are abandoned in the fall. After the new queens leave, all the workers eventually die due to starvation and cold weather. After mating, the queens seek protected sites in which to spend the winter; they are the only ones that survive the winter. The following spring they emerge from their long winter's rest and search for a suitable nesting site and begin construction of new nests. Old nests are never reused, but a favorable nesting site may be selected year after year. During August the colony reaches its maximum size of worker wasps. The maximum size depends on the species: paper wasps may only produce a few dozen workers, while colonies of yellow jackets may reach one or two thousand wasps. For those attempting to kill off a wasp nest, size certainly does matter.

The most challenging of all social vespids to get rid of are those that construct concealed nests **inside** walls, attics and other areas inside homes and structures. Wasp sprays are seldom effective against these nests because the nest is often located some distance from the entrance and the spray never reaches the core of the nest. Insecticidal dusts are very effective when blown into the nest opening.

If you discover yellow jackets nesting inside your home, you can choose to ignore it or call a pest control company to destroy it. Never plug the outside opening of these nests because this will force the wasps to chew their way into the interior of the house and this is never a good thing.