

Paper Wasp

Common Name: Paper wasp

Scientific Name: *Polistes* sp.

Order: Hymenoptera

Description: Paper wasps are 3/4 to 1 inch long, slender, narrow-waisted wasps with smoky black wings that are folded lengthwise when at rest. Body coloration varies with species: *Polistes exclamans* is brown with yellow markings on the head, thorax and bands on the abdomen; *Polistes carolina* is overall reddish-brown.



Paper wasps should not be confused with yellow jackets (*Vespula squamosa* Drury) and bald-faced hornets (*Dolichovespa maculata* (Linnaeus)). Paper wasp nests are open and cells are not covered with a cap (in an envelope).

Life Cycle: Paper wasps are semi-social insects and colonies contain three castes: workers, queens and males.

Fertilized queens, which appear similar to workers, overwinter in protected habitats such as cracks and crevices in structures or under tree bark. In the spring they select a nesting site and begin to build a nest. Eggs are laid singly in cells and hatch into legless grub-like larvae that develop through several stages (instars) before pupating. Cells remain open until developing larvae pupate. Sterile worker wasps assist in building the nest, feeding young and defending the nest. A mature paper wasp nest may have 20 to 30 adults. In late summer, queens stop laying eggs and the colony soon begins to decline. In the fall, mated female offspring of the queen seek overwintering sites. The remainder of the colony does not survive the winter.



Habitat, Food Source(s), Damage: Mouthparts are for chewing. Nests are built from wood fiber collected from posts and occasionally from live plant stems, causing some plant damage. This fiber is chewed and formed into a single paper-like comb of hexagonal cells. Nests are oriented downward and are suspended by a single filament. Mature nests contain up to 200 cells. Paper wasps prey on insects such as caterpillars, flies and beetle larvae which they feed to larvae. They actively forage during the day and all colony members rest on the nest at night.

Wasps can be found on flowers, particularly from goldenrod in late fall. Paper wasp nests can be dislodged from eaves using sprays of high pressure water from a good distance, taking precautions not to allow wasps to attack nearby people or pets. Wasps will eventually abandon the nest.