

When Honey Bees Swarm

Is There Anything You Can (or Should) Do?

What's the difference between a honey bee swarm and a honey bee colony? A colony is an established hive, complete with combs and nectar and young bees that are being cared for. A swarm is simply a mass of bees (and their queen) that is looking for a place to become a colony. Swarming is the way that an established bee colony reproduces.

Honey bees swarm in spring and early summer, with the earliest swarms being the largest. The swarms are most often a result of rapid colony growth in the spring due to abundant pollen and nectar sources. Sometimes a swarm occurs as a result of adverse conditions or starvation in a colony. As the hive conditions change, the colony produces a new queen and male bees. The old queen then leaves with about half of the worker bees to look for a new nest site, leaving the young queen to repopulate the parent colony.

When in flight, a swarm looks like a bee tornado as the bees fly in a large mass. The swarm occasionally stops to rest in a tree, or on virtually any other object. They crowd their bodies together in what is, more or less, an elongated ball or pear-shaped cluster. The presence of a newly formed swarm may be an indication that there is a parent colony nearby.

Because there is no hive to defend, honey bee swarms are generally more docile than a colony and are not disturbed by nearby activity. Beekeepers can often simply shake them into a box, but we still don't recommend that you try it. When a swarm cluster is not bothering anyone, the best thing is to just leave it alone. Most swarms will fly on within a few hours, or at most, within a few days. During that time, scout bees are out looking for a location for the new colony.

Swarm cluster removal might be necessary if it is located where children or pets or someone with a sting allergy could come in direct contact with the bees, or if the presence



Honey bee swarm on fence rail (Bidgee/Wikimedia)

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Honey Bee Swarms...continued

of a swarm impacts public safety. A cluster on a child's slide, on the front door of a home, on an airplane's wing, or hanging on a traffic signal might call for removal. Because there is always a chance that a scout bee will discover a good nest site nearby, it is sometimes smart to have any swarm cluster on or near a house removed.

So, how do you go about removing a bee swarm? Used to be that beekeepers were happy to remove a swarm, no charge, as they got to add the bees to their colonies. But today, with Africanized bees and all the diseases and parasites that honey bees face, beekeepers are reluctant to accept wild bees. Some may still remove swarms, often for a fee. It's not illegal to kill wild honey bees but most of us prefer not to.

How to Deal With a Honey Bee Swarm

- Do nothing with a honey bee swarm if you don't have to. Usually, the problem will take care of itself soon enough. Advise your customer to keep children and pets away.
- If the swarm is to be removed, contact your state beekeeper's association or your county Cooperative Extension Service for names of local beekeepers.
- In the rare case where a swarm is located in a building wall or ceiling void, the removal is a little bit more complicated and may involve cutting into walls. You should still consult with a local beekeeper for advice before you attempt this kind of job.
- You should not try to kill or remove the swarm yourself unless you are trained to do so and have special protective gear. Accessible bee swarms can be killed with one cup liquid dishwashing detergent mixed with one gallon water, sprayed through a compressed air sprayer. Soapy water is less likely than insecticide to agitate the bees. Wet all the bees thoroughly and catch them in a garbage can as they drop from the swarm.

New Report Addresses the Decline in Honey Bee Health

Honey bee colony collapse disorder (CCD) has been a topic of concern for years as experts try to determine the cause for the serious drop in the number of honey bees. EPA and the United States Department of Agriculture just released a comprehensive report that determined that there are actually multiple factors involved in colony decline.

The report implicates a combination of poor nutrition, the parasitic Varroa mite and various new viruses that attack honey bees, along with a lack of genetic diversity among colonies that would confer resistance to parasites and disease. Some earlier studies had indicated that the use of pesticides, especially neonicotinoids, on crops pollinated by honey bees was the cause of CCD. The new report states that it is still not clear whether or not pesticide exposure is a major factor. More research is needed on pesticide impact, including the actual levels of exposure to pesticides that bees receive. View the full report at: usda.gov/documents/ReportHoneyBeeHealth.pdf

The European Hornet - A Different Kind of Wasp

The European hornet (not to be confused with the European paper wasp) is a different kind of wasp. It's the largest true wasp in the U.S. (> 1 inch long; 26 mm) and the largest of the social wasps that we deal with. It has a yellow and brown abdomen with reddish-brown head, thorax, and legs and looks similar to the solitary cicada killer wasp.



European hornet - Vespa crabro
(publicphoto.org)

Unlike other wasps, the European hornet also flies at night, especially in humid, windless weather. It is attracted to outdoor lights and tends to repeatedly bang against lighted windows. Because it is such a large insect, that scares people. The hornet itself is not as aggressive as a yellowjacket but will sting to protect the nest. Unlike yellowjackets, the hornets attack individually so there is less chance of multiple stings. That's a good thing since the sting can be quite painful and is more likely to result in an allergic reaction than the stings of bees or yellowjackets.

European hornets are social nesters with a typical colony having 300-500 workers at its peak. In late summer, sexually active males and females are produced and newly inseminated queens prepare to overwinter in protected places before starting a new colony the following spring. Nests are not reused.

The Nest. The European hornet makes a paper nest like the baldfaced hornet but its nest is not as visible. The nest is usually in a hollow tree, but can also be found in an abandoned bee hive, bird house, or in a barn, attic, or wall void.

The nest has layers of combs like a yellowjacket's nest. Those in voids tend to have 6 to 9 combs and can be up to 2-3 feet in length, with a noticeable foul smell. Nests in unprotected sites (uncommon) have an outer papery envelope, while nests in protected sites and building voids do not have the outer covering. A European hornet's nest has a brown outer covering while the baldfaced hornet's nest has a gray covering.

Damage. The European hornet is a predator on caterpillars, moths, butterflies, flies, bees, grasshoppers and other large insects. Although it feeds on insects, this wasp also has a sweet tooth. Instead of visiting flowers for nectar, it has a habit of stripping the bark from branches, especially lilacs, to feed on the sap. Girdling can kill small twigs; the damage is most noticeable in late summer. European hornets also make pests of themselves by chewing holes in ripe fruit and raiding honey bee hives.

Control. Control of this hornet is not as simple as that for yellowjackets since these hornets are active at night, attracted to light (your flashlight), and may have more than one nest entrance. Treatment is best done just before sunrise or just at dusk, with protective equipment and without a flashlight.

New 2013 Bed Bug Survey Results

Bed Bug Problems Are Not Going Away

Have you heard that bed bugs are finally on the decline in the U.S.? Not so, according to a brand new 2013 bed bug survey of 251 pest management companies. Bed bugs are just as much of a problem, if not more, than ever before. The National Pest Management Association, in cooperation with the University of Kentucky, has conducted its third Bugs Without Borders survey. The previous survey of pest management companies was in 2011.

The 2013 survey found that 99.6% of all companies have encountered a bed bug problem in the past 12 months (99% in 2011; 95% in 2010). Seventy-two percent of the respondents say that bed bug problems in their region are increasing, compared to 90% in 2011. Only 3% of respondents in the 2013 survey felt that bed bug problems were decreasing.

Seventy-six percent of respondents said bed bugs continue to be the most difficult pest to treat. The biggest challenge is dealing with clutter in customers' homes according to 66% of PMPs. Other problems affecting control are customers not following advice (58%) and reinfestation (16%).

Residences continue to be the prime sites treated for bed bugs. The number of companies treating apartments/condominiums (98%), and single-family homes (96%) are up slightly from 2011. The percentage of PMPs that treated other sites are listed below:

- Hotels/motels - 75% (80% in 2011)
- College dorms - 47% (54% in 2011)
- Nursing homes - 46% (46% in 2011)
- Hospitals - 33% (31% in 2011)
- Office buildings - 36% (38% in 2011)
- Schools/day care - 41% (36% in 2011)
- Libraries - 12% (8% in 2011)
- Trains/buses/taxi - 21% (18% in 2011)
- Airplanes - 2% (6% in 2011)
- Movie theaters - 10% (17% in 2011)
- Restaurants - 7% (6% in 2011)
- Retail stores - 15% (21% in 2011)
- Laundromats - 9% (6% in 2011)

