



NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Spring is Buzzing with Bees (May 24, 2025)

By Tulare/Kings Counties Master Gardener

Spring is exciting. Ornamental trees bloom, flowers grow, and insects buzz. Leave it to Mother Nature to tease us with the beauty, then bite us with the beast. Nearly everyone has been stung by a bee at one time or another. It's an unpleasant experience, but for most people, the damage inflicted is only temporary pain. Only a small percentage of the population (one to two people out of 1000) is allergic or hypersensitive to bee or wasp stings.

All creatures follow their instincts. If we learn more about bees, perhaps we can avoid getting stung. Let's take a closer look at some bees that are quite active right now. Most everyone is familiar with and understands the value of the honeybee for pollination and honey production, while the bumble and carpenter bees are less known and often mistaken for each other.

Honey bees

Honey bees collecting water or gathering pollen and nectar from flowers are not aggressive but will sting if provoked or harmed. Bees foraging for food are unlikely to sting people because they are away from home, where it is not necessary to defend the colony. Generally speaking, if left alone, they will not bother people. They will defend their hive or nest and will attack and sting anyone in their territory who is believed to be a threat to the colony. Honey bees form a wax comb to rear their young and store food.



Bumble bees

Bumble bees are stout-bodied, robust insects covered with black hairs that are tinged with yellow, orange, or red on their head, thorax (midsection), and abdomen. Queens are bigger (about an inch long) than the smaller males and much smaller workers (undeveloped females). Both the queens and workers can inflict a painful sting. Overwintering queens come out of hibernation in May. There are usually less than 200 individuals in a colony, and nests are generally found in open grasslands. Nests can be detected by the presence of many males flying about the entrance. Stinging workers, sometimes called "dive bombers," can respond quickly when their territory is invaded. Bumble bees are also important pollinators due to their long tongues.



Carpenter bees

Carpenter bees resemble bumble bees. They are also about 1 inch long, but colored a metallic blue-black with green or purplish reflections. The thorax is covered with bright yellow, orange, or white hairs, but the abdomen is black and shiny. It is the males with white/yellow markings on their head that fly around buzzing aggressively, but they are harmless since they lack a stinger. Their distinctive yellow face is easily seen when in flight. Females have black heads, are docile, and rarely sting when flying around the garden.

People are frightened by carpenter bees because of their large size, their similarity to bumble bees, and their annoying noise. This bee is unique from most because it builds its nest in wood. Nests usually consist of tunnels ½ inch in diameter and 6 to 10 inches deep. Carpenter bees are not social insects, so there is no densely populated nest. However, carpenter bees do often use old tunnels for their nests, and sometimes several bees may use a common entry hole connecting to different tunnels. The larva of carpenter bees is so large and noisy that it often attracts woodpeckers.

Removing stingers

Stingers are effective weapons because they deliver venom that causes pain when injected into the skin. The body responds to stings by releasing fluid from the blood and sending it to the sting site, which causes redness and swelling. When the sting is caused by a honey bee, the stinger usually remains in the skin after the insect leaves because the stinger is barbed. Remove the stinger as quickly as possible because venom continues to enter the skin from the stinger for 45 to 60 seconds following a sting.

Avoiding Stings

Bees can be attracted to odors or scents in the garden, so it's best to avoid perfumes or scented soaps when going into areas where you might encounter bees. Bees are unlikely to sting unless provoked by swatting at them, running into one with force, or stepping on one (in which case, the bee is most often hurt more than you, although a bee sting doesn't feel like a minor incident at the time!). Avoid going barefoot into vegetation, especially blooming ground covers or white clover. Also, avoid wearing brightly colored or patterned clothing. If a bee should land on your skin, if you remain calm, it will most likely leave of its own accord. If you don't want to wait for

it to leave, gently and slowly brush it away with a piece of paper.

All in all, remember that bees are important pollinators in agriculture and our gardens, and their main focus is collecting pollen to feed their hives, not chasing down humans just to sting or bite!

Questions? Call the Master Gardeners:

Tulare County: (559) 684-3325, Tues & Thurs, 9:30-11:30;

Kings County: (559) 852-2736, Thursday Only, 9:30–11:30 am

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The Tulare-Kings Counties Master Gardeners will answer your questions in person:

Visalia Farmer's Market, 1st & 3rd Saturdays, 8 - 11 am, Tulare Co. Courthouse

Luis Nursery, 2nd Saturday, 10 am – 2 pm, 139 S. Mariposa Ave., Visalia

Hofman's Nursery, 3rd Saturday, 10 am – 1 pm, 12491 W Lacey Blvd., Hanford

Springville Farmer's Market, 3rd Saturday, 10 am – Noon, Springville