

Queen wasps usually emerge from their hibernation around mid. April and quickly start looking for suitable nesting sites in which to start their new colony. Numerous types of location may be chosen, places such as in trees, under rocks, in compost bins, bird boxes, inside seldom used sheds and garages, inside cavity brick walls (entering either through air bricks or gaps in the brickwork), roof spaces are particularly attractive to them where they can have plenty of space to extend their nests.

Once a site has been selected the Queen wasp will make a small round nest not much bigger than a golf ball. She makes this by chewing off bits of wood from a suitable near-by source and mixing it with her own saliva into a kind of wood paste which she then fashions into shape. Within the completed nest she will lay approx. 10-20 eggs which she will then tend until their emergence, feeding them on a protein rich diet of mainly captured insects. Once these new worker wasps emerge the queen herself will no longer need to leave the nest as her offspring will take over her duties of finding food and beginning the task of extending the nest.

Worker wasps are all infertile females who instead of having an ovipositor, or egg laying tube, have a sting, which, unlike a bees sting, can be used several times. During the course of their active season (April – October) a typical nest would have produced in excess of 25,000 wasps, all laid by the one solitary queen. They are not all alive at the same time but at the end of a successful summer a reasonably sized nest will contain about 5,000 wasps.

When a worker wasp returns to the nest with its prey to feed the baby wasp grub/larva, after eating, the grub will secrete a sweet substance which the worker wasp eats as its reward. This mutual benefit helps to form strong bonds within the colony and ensures the workers continue to feed the young wasps. During August to September the nests will start to come to an end. The last hatchings of the season are the new queens and males, these are noticeably bigger wasps than the workers. After their emergence there are no young left to secrete the sweet substance that the workers need, this is one of the reasons why around August time wasps can be problematic when coming into buildings or buzzing around barbeques in search of a replacement supply of sweet substances.

As the weather turns cold at the end of October the new queens, after mating, will search for a place to hibernate over winter. The males, all of the worker wasps and the original queen who started the colony will all die. Not all of the hibernating queens will survive, especially if it's a very long cold winter, but some will survive and emerge the following April to start all over again.

Most people dislike wasps, obviously due to their ability to sting. However, for some people who are allergic, being stung by a wasp can be a matter of life or death. There are deaths every year as a direct consequence of wasp stings.

Depending on where the nest is located it is sometimes possible to treat it yourself. However care should be taken to wrap up well in order to try and reduce the risk of being stung.

Ground level nests in rockeries etc. or in sheds, garages or in low level airbricks can all be treated by applying ant powder into the entrance hole through which you have

observed them entering. First make the hole in the nozzle of the pack of powder a little larger to enable a better flow. Early morning or late evening are the best times to apply the powder when at these times the wasps are far less active. Puff a liberal amount of the powder into the entrance hole of the nest, providing the area is not too damp and it does not rain, the wasps should transport the powder into their nest as soon as any activity starts. This may have to be repeated if the nest is well established but if carried out earlier in the season once should be sufficient.

If the nest is located inside a roof space or high up where the use of a ladder is necessary then it is not recommended that you attempt it yourself as numerous accidents occur with people falling from heights after being stung, sometimes several times.

All nests die out at the end of each season and the nest is never used again. If it's in your roof-space it will cause you no problems and will simply be an empty shell of thin wood. New emerging queens always start from fresh and build their own nest.