# How to Identify Wasp, Hornet, and Bee Nests Around Your Home

## Why Correct Identification Matters

Spotting a nest near your home can be unsettling. But before you take any action, it pays to know exactly what you are dealing with. Wasps, hornets, and bees build very different nests, and each type requires a different approach. Misidentifying a nest can lead to unnecessary risk or, in the case of honeybees, harm to a beneficial colony. This article walks you through the steps to recognize the nest type, assess the situation, and understand what to do next.

## Step 1: Observe the Nest Location and Shape

The first clue is where the nest sits and what it looks like. Each species has a preferred nesting site and a characteristic structure.

### Paper Wasp Nests

Paper wasps build open, umbrella-shaped nests made of a papery material. They chew wood fibers and mix them with saliva to create a light gray or brown comb. The cells are visible from below, and the nest is usually attached by a single stalk to eaves, porch ceilings, window frames, or inside sheds and garages. Paper wasp nests are typically small, holding a few dozen to a couple hundred wasps.

### Yellowjacket Nests

Yellowjackets often nest underground, in abandoned rodent burrows, rock walls, or in wall voids of buildings. Their nests are enclosed in a papery envelope, so you rarely see the comb. The entrance is a small hole, and you may notice yellowjackets flying in and out of the same spot in the ground or a crack in your foundation. Some species also build hanging nests in shrubs or trees.



### Hornet Nests

Hornets, particularly the bald-faced hornet common in Connecticut, build large, football-shaped nests high in trees, shrubs, or under eaves. The nest is enclosed in a gray papery shell with a single small opening at the bottom. These nests can grow to the size of a basketball and house hundreds of hornets. Unlike paper wasps, you cannot see the comb from the outside.

### Bee Nests

Honeybees build nests inside cavities like hollow trees, wall voids, or chimneys. Their comb is made of wax, not paper, and is vertical with cells packed closely together. Bumblebees nest in the ground, often in old mouse nests or under piles of leaves. Their nests are smaller and less organized, with a few dozen bees at most. Carpenter bees drill round holes into wood, such as siding, decks, or fence posts, and create tunnels inside.

## Step 2: Look at the Insects Themselves

If you can safely get a look at the insects, their appearance will confirm the nest type.

**Paper wasps** are slender, with long legs that dangle in flight. They are usually brown with yellow markings, and they fold their wings lengthwise when resting. **Yellowjackets** are stockier, with bright yellow and black bands, and they are more aggressive. **Hornets** have a white or cream-colored face and a black body with white markings. They are larger than yellowjackets and less likely to enter homes. **Honeybees** are fuzzy, golden brown with black bands, and they are often seen visiting flowers. **Bumblebees** are large, round, and covered in black and yellow

fuzz. **Carpenter bees** look similar to bumblebees but have a shiny black abdomen and hover near wood surfaces.

## Step 3: Assess the Activity Level

Watch the nest from a safe distance at different times of day. Wasps and hornets are most active during warm daylight hours. If you see a steady stream of insects entering and leaving, the nest is well established. A few insects coming and going may indicate a small or new colony. Bees are often active earlier in the morning and later in the evening, and they carry pollen on their legs.

Pay attention to their behavior. Paper wasps and yellowjackets can become aggressive if you approach their nest. Hornets are defensive and may attack in numbers if they feel threatened. Honeybees are generally docile when foraging but will defend their hive if disturbed. Bumblebees are not aggressive unless their nest is directly threatened.




## Step 4: Decide Whether to Act

Not every nest needs immediate removal. If the nest is small, located far from high-traffic areas, and the insects are not aggressive, you may be able to leave it alone until winter when most wasps and hornets die off. However, if the nest is near doors, windows, play areas, or decks, or if someone in your household is allergic to stings, removal is advisable.

For honeybee nests, consider contacting a local beekeeper who can relocate the colony. Bees are valuable pollinators, and they often do not survive if treated with pesticides. For wasp and hornet nests, do not attempt removal if the nest is large, high off the ground, or inside a wall. Professional pest control services have the equipment and experience to handle these situations safely.

## Step 5: Understand Safe Removal Options

If you decide to remove a small, accessible nest yourself, do it at dusk or early morning when insects are less active. Wear protective clothing: long sleeves, pants, gloves, a hat, and a veil or scarf to cover your face. Use a wasp and hornet spray that shoots a long stream. Approach slowly, spray the nest thoroughly, and then retreat. Wait 24 hours before removing the nest to ensure all insects are dead.

For underground yellowjacket nests, use an insecticidal dust applied to the entrance at night. Cover the entrance afterward to prevent escape. Never pour gasoline or other flammable liquids into a nest; this is extremely dangerous and can cause fires or explosions.

For nests in wall voids or attics, do not seal the entrance until you are certain the nest is empty. Trapped insects can find their way into living spaces through other cracks. In these cases, hornet nest removal is best left to a professional who can treat the void safely.

If you are unsure of the species, the nest is large, or you have any doubt about your ability to remove it safely, call a pest control expert. They can identify the insect, locate hidden nests, and remove them without putting you or your property at risk. Professional **hornet nest removal** often involves specialized equipment and protective gear that most homeowners do not have.



## Step 6: Prevent Future Nests

Once a nest is removed, take steps to discourage new ones. Seal cracks and gaps in siding, foundations, and around windows and doors. Keep eaves and attics well maintained. Remove fallen fruit, pet food, and other attractants from your yard. Consider hanging decoy wasp nests, as wasps and hornets are territorial and may avoid areas where they see an existing nest.

Regular inspections in early spring, when queens are starting new colonies, can help you spot and remove small nests before they become large problems. With a little vigilance and the right knowledge, you can keep your property safe from unwanted stinging insects.