

Carpenter Bees

HANDOUT

Carpenter bees, *Xylocopa* spp., are large (3/4 to 1 inch long), heavy-bodied insects. Their blue-black metallic bodies will have some yellow or orange hair. They resemble bumblebees, but can be distinguished by their shiny, black, hairless abdomens. The abdomen of the bumblebee is yellow and hairy. Bumblebees also have large pollen baskets on their hind legs.

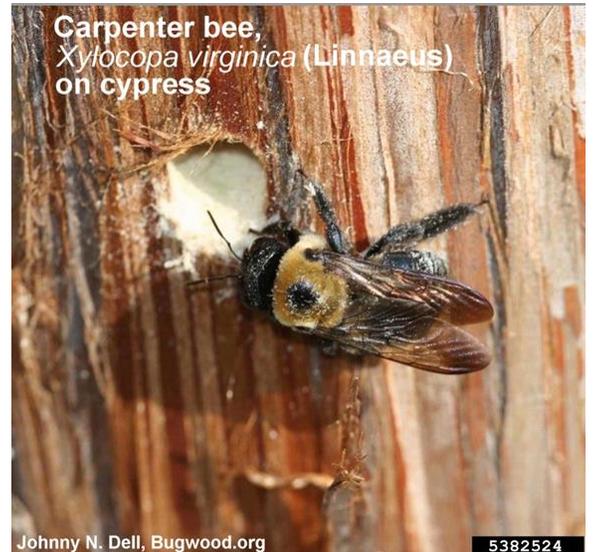
In the spring, carpenter bees become a nuisance as they fly erratically, close to homes and other buildings. Males hover like humming birds, waiting for females to emerge so they can mate. If the males are disturbed, they may hover or buzz around a person's head. Only the female stings, and then only if molested. After the mating season, most of the summer is spent loitering around the nest or nearby flowers.

Carpenter bees are a nuisance to have around and they also bore into seasoned woods, especially soft woods such as cedar, redwood, pine, and fir. Damage may occur to soft or weathered woods on porches, decks, shed ceilings, railings, overhead trim, porch furniture, dead tree limbs, fence posts, wooden shingles, wood siding, windowsills, wood doors, etc. Female bees bore circular holes, about 1/2-inch wide, into the wood at right angles to the surface for about an inch. Then they turn sharply, boring in the direction of the wood grain for 4 to 6 inches.

Structural damage caused by one or two carpenter bees is slight. However, tunnels may be used again and lengthened by other broods. The activity of numerous bees over a period of years is certain to cause some structural damage.

Carpenter bees over-winter in wood as young adults. The tunnels are made by the females. Those bees that survive the winter mate in the spring (April to June) and then begin preparation for the next brood.

Carpenter bees do not eat the wood they tunnel in, but use these tunnels for rearing the young. The female provides her tunnel-nest with "bee bread" (a mixture of pollen and regurgitated nectar), which serves as food for the larvae when the eggs hatch. She makes a cell for each egg and then closes each cell with chewed wood pulp. The egg hatches and the single larva develops within its individual cell. There may be as many as six to eight cells in the tunnel. The time required to complete development from egg to adult varies from 1 to 3 months. Though newly formed adult bees usually emerge in late August, these bees will not mate to start the cycle over again until the following spring.



Painted wood is rarely attacked by carpenter bees, so keep all exposed wood surfaces well painted. Wood stains will not prevent attacks. Wood pressure treated with a preservative should be used if painting is not practical. Treatment involves applying insecticide into the tunnel entrance. Treat the opening after dark when the bees are less active. Do not plug the holes, but allow the bees to pass freely so they can contact the insecticide. The holes should be filled a day or two later to prevent further use. Specific control recommendations for carpenter bees may be found under the Household and Structural Pest Control section in the current edition of MP144 "Insecticide Recommendations for Arkansas."

<https://www.uaex.edu/publications/pdf/mp144/m-household-pests.pdf#page=5>

All chemical information provided is given with the understanding that no endorsement of named products is intended, nor is criticism implied of similar products that are not mentioned. Individuals who use pesticides are responsible for ensuring that the intended use complies with current regulations and conforms to the product label. Before purchasing or using any pesticide, always read and carefully follow the label directions. For assistance, contact your local County Cooperative Extension Office.

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