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Attack of the Yucca Bugs

This year you may have noticed abundant numbers of yucca bugs, *Haticotoma* spp. (Hemiptera: Miridae), if you have yucca in your landscape. The adults are about ¼ inches in length with a red head and pronotum and grayish-black wings. The yucca bugs are usually found in large groups on the upper leaf surface and will tend to move quickly when disturbed. The immature stage or nymphal stage (those without wings), will also be present on the leaves. The yucca bugs have piercing sucking mouthparts so their feeding causes small pale spots or blotches on leaf surfaces where the green chlorophyll has been removed.

Some control options for the immature stage include insecticidal soap or pyrethrins. Systemic insecticide products, such as those containing acephate, dinotefuran or imidacloprid, are also effective for control of these bugs.



Haticotoma (Hemiptera: Miridae) species on yucca. Photo by Bart Drees, Professor and Extension Entomologist, Texas A&M University.



Stinging Insects Are Active

As the temperature warms and summer approaches, we will begin to see larger populations of wasps, including paper wasps, mud daubers and yellow jackets. There are two species of paper wasps, *Polistes exclamans* which is brown with yellow markings on the head, thorax and bands on the abdomen and *Polistes carolina* which is reddish-brown in color. Both have smoky colored wings and are $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 inch in length. In the spring, the fertile queens find a nesting site and begin to build a nest. Paper wasp nests are composed of wood fibers that are chewed and formed into open hexagonal cells arranged in a comb-like shape. Their nests are oriented downward and are suspended by a single filament. Their nests can be found in such areas as underneath eaves, in structures, or around plants. Adult paper wasps prey on insects such as caterpillars, flies and beetle larvae, which they feed to developing larvae. This makes them a beneficial insect.

Some Control Options:

Since paper wasps feed on caterpillars and other insects, they are considered beneficial insects so no control is needed. However, some people may be highly allergic to their venom, so removal of the wasps nest is necessary. Nests can be knocked down from eaves using a high pressure water spray.

Also pressurized sprays of insecticidal soaps and oils can be used. Residual insecticides can also be used, such as those containing the active ingredients deltamethrin or cyfluthrin. Be sure to take precautions when treating, so the wasps will not attack nearby people or pets.



Photo of paper wasps, *Polistes carolina*.

Adult mud daubers are $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 inch in length and vary in color from dull black to black with bright yellow markings to iridescent blue-black. However they all have a long, narrow petiole (the section between the thorax and abdomen) or “waist.” These wasps are solitary, with each nest constructed and provisioned by individual mated females. They build small nests of mud under eaves of buildings, along exterior walls or inside garages. Mud daubers are rarely aggressive, but they are capable of stinging.

Some Control Options:

Since mud daubers provision their nests with mainly spiders (some even kill black widows), they are considered beneficial insects so no control is needed. Chemical control should be considered as a last resort. Mud dauber nests can be removed with a putty knife and adult wasps can be killed with a fly swatter or with an aerosol insecticide such as those containing pyrethrins or resmethrin. When using insecticides, follow label directions and safety precautions.



Black and yellow mud dauber, *Chalybion caementarium* (Drury) (Hymenoptera: Sphecidae). Photo by John Jackman, Texas A&M University.

Yellowjacket populations can also increase in the summer. Yellowjacket workers are $\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length, with black with yellow markings on the head, thorax and abdomen. The yellowjackets use their chewing mouthparts to construct carton nests. Nests are usually underground, but occasionally they can be found in wall voids and indoors. Their nests are usually spherical and consist of a number of round combs that are attached to each other and then surrounded by a layered outer covering.

Yellowjackets are considered beneficial since they feed developing larvae arthropod prey. However when their nests are disturbed, defending worker wasps can sting multiple times. Also, foraging worker wasps may be a nuisance at picnics and other outdoor events.

Some Control Options:

Insecticidal sprays can be used to kill yellowjackets. Also insecticidal dusts can be used and are sometimes preferred since the workers attempting to use the nest opening will track dust and contaminate brood and other colony members.

Wasps will attack when sensing an insecticide applied to their nests so wearing protective clothing that covers the whole body, including gloves and a veil over the face is recommended. Hiring a pest management professional is sometimes needed to reduce risks to you and your family.



Southern yellowjackets, *Vespula squamosa* (Drury) (Hymenoptera: Vespidae), developmental stages; larval stages (instars), pupae, adult. Photo by Bart Drees, Professor and Extension Entomologist, Texas A&M University.

Possible New Scale Found on Crape Myrtles in North Texas

This bark scale in the genus *Eriococcus*, is thought to be an exotic insect pest that has infested North Texas crape myrtles. These bark scales appear as white, waxy encrustations near pruning wounds or in branch crotches. Larger female scales “bleed” a pink liquid when crushed. Since this scale excretes honeydew, the limbs and leaves become sticky. In heavy infestations, black sooty mold will begin to grow on the trunk and branches of the crape myrtle.

Currently, the crape myrtle bark scale has only been observed infesting crape myrtles in north Texas area (from South Dallas to Sherman). If you live outside this area and believe you have an infestation of this scale, please submit your sample or a picture of the infested crape myrtle to your local county Extension office or to Dr. Mike Merchant (m-merchant@tamu.edu) or myself (k-schofield@tamu.edu) at the Texas AgriLife Research and Extension Center, 17360 Coit Road, Dallas, TX 75252.

Some Control Options:

For heavily infested crape myrtles, it is recommended to wash the trunk and limbs with a soft brush and dishwashing soap solution to remove female scales and egg masses. Also, washing with the soapy water will remove some of the black mold.

Systemic insecticides such as those containing imidacloprid or dinotefuran as a drench applied to the root zone have shown good control when applied between the months of May and July. Also winter applications of dormant oil to the bark and crotches of the plants where scales shelter is an effective control option.



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