

European wasp identification guide

Suspect European wasp sightings should be reported. Learn the differences between the European wasp, *Vespula germanica*, and other species including the common and widespread yellow paper wasp, *Polistes dominulus*.

European wasps are declared pests in Western Australia and must be eradicated when found. If you suspect you have seen European wasps please report using [MyPestGuide](#), or contact the Pest and Disease Information Service (PaDIS) - see contact details below.

Why report?

The European wasp is considered one of the worst wasps in the world; harmful to people, our outdoor lifestyles and our horticultural and agricultural industries. Reports from the public, industry and local government, in combination with our surveillance traps, help to find and eradicate this pest. Every year, fertilised European wasp queens are accidentally transported into our state in freight and cargo from Eastern Australia. They must be detected and eradicated if we are to remain free of this pest.

How to identify European wasps

European wasps:

- have black antennae
- usually nest underground and
- have an attraction to meat, pet food and human foods.

Similar looking insects

Because of their yellow and black stripes, several wasps, bees and flies can be mistaken for European wasps.



European wasp comparison photo showing other species commonly mistaken for European wasps (click to enlarge)

Native flower wasps (Families Tiphiidae and Scoliidae) are much larger. These harmless solitary wasps are beneficial pollinators. They are solitary and only come together during the mating season.

Yellow paper wasps are bright yellow and black. Paper wasps differ being slightly longer and thinner (more wasp-like). Unlike European wasps, paper wasps hover with their back legs hanging down and have orange-brown antennae.

Honey bees are about the same size, but have black legs, are hairier and are dull brown-orange in colour, as opposed to bright yellow and black.

European wasp or yellow paper wasp?

Yellow paper wasps are easy to confuse with European wasps. They are very common and widespread in WA and are frequently seen nesting in guttering, under fence capping or attached to bushes. Paper wasps are often seen visiting flowers, ponds or water taps. Look for their distinctive papery honeycomb nest or note the colour of the antennae and the position of the legs when they fly.



European wasp and paper wasp comparison next to a 50-cent coin

Differences between European wasps and paper wasps

	European wasp	Paper wasp
Size	Workers: about 15mm long (size of a bee) Queens: larger (not usually seen)	15–19mm long (longer than a bee)

	European wasp	Paper wasp
Body shape	Stout: like a bee	Longer and thinner than a bee. Narrow waist
Colour	Bright yellow and black only	Yellow paper wasp: bright yellow and black
Antennae (feelers)	All black (see picture above)	Yellow-orange (see picture above)
Flying	Legs held close to body during flight. Fly very quickly, generally do not hover	Back legs dangle down during flight. Often seen hovering around bushes, over lawns and around water sources
Food	European wasps are scavengers feeding from pet food, meat or vegetable scraps, meat products, fish or dead insects on vehicle grilles.	Paper wasps feed on insects including caterpillars, flies, beetle larvae and nectar. These are not scavengers and will not target meat products (eg. BBQs, pet food, dead insects etc.)

Differences between European wasp and paper wasp nests



Below and above ground European wasp nests on the left-hand side and typical paperwasp nests on the right-hand side. (click to enlarge)

European wasp nest

Paper wasp nest

Nests	Rarely seen. Usually below ground with the entrance appearing as a hole in the ground	Often seen. Usually above ground
Location	Normally in the ground but may be found in a roof or wall cavity on rare occasions. Will have a busy entrance hole with many wasps entering and exiting per minute	Under fence capping or roof tiles, also under eaves and in dense shrubs. Sometimes in hollow steel piping and guttering

	European wasp nest	Paper wasp nest
Size	Large: growing in summer to be the size of a basketball or bigger	Golf ball to crumpet sized. Rarely as big as a dinner plate
Shape	Round or football shaped with an outer covering of insulating material that looks like grey paper mache or egg carton material	Single flat layer of papery honeycomb cells. Grey-brown in colour, often with some white-capped cells

Treatment of wasp nests

	European wasp nest	Paper wasp nest
Treatment	Treated and removed free of charge by the Agriculture and Food, DPIRD. All nests (dead or alive) must be reported.	By the householder or pest control operator. First nests need to be located for control. This can be done by following drinking wasps back from water. Spray nests after sundown with fly spray. Remove and destroy nests the next day once all wasps are dead. Nests left untreated will produce more queens which can lead to an increase in wasp populations the following year.
Caution	Do not attempt to treat the nest yourself. It is hazardous to approach the nest as wasps can sting repeatedly.	Avoid approaching the nest during the day. Wasps will sting and can sting repeatedly.

Contact information

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