



Exopest Fact Sheet

Information supplied by CSIRO

Common paper wasps

Common paper wasps are social insects, who build nests of grey papery material around the home often under eaves, pergolas or in vegetation.

Description

Polistes humilis or common paper wasps are generally slender with long thin wings.

They are 10-15 millimetres long, tan in colour with darker bands and some yellow on the face.

Other species of paper wasps are larger or smaller and differently coloured.

Paper wasps make nests of grey papery wood fibre material.



The nests are cone-shaped, becoming round as more cells are added.

Nests are a maximum diameter of 10-12 centimetres, with numerous hexagonal cells underneath, some with white caps.

Nests are exposed and suspended by a short stalk under an overhang, often on a pergola, the eaves of a roof or in a shrub or tree.

Wasps cluster on the nest or forage in the garden and around buildings. Paper wasps will often attack if they are disturbed or feel threatened.

Paper wasps are found across mainland southern Australia including:

- southern Queensland
- New South Wales
- the Australian Capital Territory
- Victoria
- South Australia
- southern Western Australia.

Paper wasps (*Polistes* spp.) are native to Australia except for the European and English wasps (*Vespula* spp.)

Life history

Paper wasps are a social wasp consisting of small colonies of 12-20 individuals.

Adult wasps feed on nectar and make 'paper' nests by mixing saliva and wood fibres.

Nests are a nursery where larvae are kept one to each cell.

The larvae are fed on chewed-up caterpillars caught by the adults.

The cells are then capped and the larvae pupate. Most paper wasps die in autumn or winter, while some hibernate to start new nests next season.

Pest status and management

Paper wasps have some beneficial value as predators of pest caterpillars, however they have a painful sting and will attack any person approaching or disturbing their nest.

Nests likely to be disturbed represent a hazard and should be avoided during the day.

Ignore nests where they are high or otherwise out of the way.

Nests in high traffic areas such as doorways, pergolas or carports can be sprayed from the side at night with a registered aerosol wasp insecticide.

Repeat spray two nights afterwards then remove and destroy the nest. Use a red light (for example, red cellophane over a torch lens) if light is needed when spraying at night.

In the event of a sting apply a cold pack.

Seek medical attention if the victim is known to be allergic or if symptoms become more severe.

Fast facts

- Paper wasps belong to the insect order Hymenoptera
- They can be found across mainland south-eastern Australia and in southern Western Australia
- Paper wasps are social insects and make their nests of grey papery material by mixing saliva and wood fibres
- They have a painful sting and will attack if their nest is disturbed