

Two "Bugaboos" of Summer

By KJ Armann, M.D.

In our area we have many insects and plants that cause us pain, itching, swelling, and sometimes an allergic reaction. The two most commonly seen by me at the office are yellow jackets and bee stings. Poison oak dermatitis is the third bugaboo, please visit my website for additional information.



Growing up here in Silicon Valley was great. Summer brought many days outside playing and going on adventures. Sometimes we found ourselves involved with unwanted inhabitants of this valley, and the worst of them all, in my opinion, was the yellow jacket.

Yellow jackets, also called meat bees, are part of the wasp family and are not related to honeybees. They are very aggressive, territorial, and downright nasty. They will sting multiple times, as they do not lose their stinger like the honey bee. When they are threatened they can send out a chemical signal to their nest mates, who will come join the attack. How can we avoid their stings? They like sweet smelling things, so don't wear perfume to summer parties. Pouring drinks from the can into open top containers will prevent yellow jacket stings of the mouth and throat.



Do not swat at them this only makes them mad and they will attack you! Place yellow jacket traps around the edge of the yard.

These traps are yellow jacket attracting so wasps will go to these traps to find food.

You want these traps placed as far away from where you and your family will be spending the majority of your summer, preferably 60 to 75 feet away from eating and activity areas. Early in the season is the best time to put out your traps before the yellow jacket population grows in numbers.

If you get stung, immediately put ice on the sting. Make a paste of Adolph's Meat Tenderizer and water, applying this paste to the sting has been reported to neutralize the venom. Other remedies include using baking soda and water, or toothpaste, or damp tea bag to help decrease the reaction to the venom.

Seek immediate medical attention if you get stung more than ten times at once, or are stung in the mouth or throat, or are having any symptoms of an allergic reaction, such as:

swelling of the throat or mouth, difficulty breathing or speaking, have hives or other rash, wheezing, or tightness of the chest.

All yellow jacket stings will be red and swollen for several days. Some of these wounds can become secondary infected, which will then require medical attention and possibly antibiotics.

Honeybees are our garden's friends, and they don't want to sting us. Most of the time we get stung by stepping on the bee without shoes on or hitting the bee out of fright or by accident. The honeybee's stinger has barbs which lodge in the skin holding the stinger and venom sack in place. The venom sack will pulsate to pump the venom into its victim. It is important NOT to grab or pinch the sack or stinger. Instead use the edge of a credit card, butter knife, or your fingernail to scrap the stinger off. This will decrease the amount of venom pumped into your body.



Treatment and caution are the same for either the Yellow Jacket or the Honeybee's sting. Be prepared, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.



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