



Cicada Killer Wasps

I've had a number of calls about very large wasps that people have seen around their homes lately. Chances are good it's a cicada killer. In fact, there's a nest of one under the steps of my own home here in Fremont.

The cicada killer is actually the largest wasp you can find in Nebraska. The adult wasps can be up to 2 inches in length. Their size makes them seem incredibly intimidating, when actually they are quite docile. The cicada killer is a solitary insect, which will burrow into soil for nest making. Unlike honeybees or hornets, they don't become territorial near their nest, and are very unlikely to sting you.

The cicada killer is named because of their prey of choice – adult cicadas. A cicada killer wasp can chase and capture a cicada mid-flight. They will then sting the cicada, causing it to become paralyzed, and bring it back to its nest. The female lays eggs in the nest, and when the eggs hatch, the larvae of the wasp feed on the dead cicadas.

Cicada wasps prefer loose, open patches of soil for nesting. This is why you can commonly find them along retaining walls and sidewalks where there is bare soil with little vegetation. Unfortunately, these spots are also often near doors to homes and/or garages. If you walk near the nest, the wasps may seem to be flying after you, but chances are they have just become disoriented and are trying to find their way back to the nest. Even though they can catch their prey mid-air, they are actually pretty clumsy fliers, and they can easily become disoriented.

How likely are you to get stung by a cicada killer wasp? A sting by one of these insects is *highly* unlikely. Stepping on one barefoot, or trying to catch one in your hand would increase the chances of a sting, but otherwise, it's pretty rare. Keep in mind too, that only the females can sting. The males might be slightly more aggressive in their behavior, but since they don't have a stinger, they're all bark with no bite.

Cicada killer wasps are considered a beneficial insect – control is usually not needed or warranted. Also keep in mind the males will only live for about two weeks, and the females for about four weeks, so soon their numbers will drop off. If they have begun nesting extensively in your yard, or if you have small children or pets you fear might try to catch a wasp, treat nest openings with carbaryl (Sevin) dust.

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