

How to Deal with Cicada Killer Wasps

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A male cicada.

Fast Facts on Cicada Killers

- Largest species of wasp in Nebraska, measuring 1-1/2 to 2 inches in length.
- Females are larger than males and possess a long stinger at the end of their body. Despite this, they are not aggressive towards humans and only use their venom to subdue prey.
- Males are territorial of the nest site and fly close to humans. They are harmless because they do not possess a stinger.
- Homeowners often mistake the nest of cicada killers for rodent or wildlife

Life Cycle

Cicada killer wasps appear in Nebraska in July and continue to fly around until mid-September. Female wasps dig individual burrows and hunt cicadas to feed to their offspring. She uses her stinger to paralyze and then drag the cicada into an underground chamber where she lays one egg on it and places it inside a cell. Each burrow is used by just one female, but she can have numerous tunnels, cells, paralyzed cicadas and eggs developing inside. When an egg hatches the larva feeds on the cicada, consuming its vitals last, it builds a silken cocoon to pupates and emerges as an adult the following summer. Adult wasps feed on plant nectar.

Damage

Cicada killer wasps are considered by entomologists to be beneficial insect predators, but their presence in numbers, often elicits fear. Some people are bothered by the unsightly holes and piles of soil around nesting locations, which are often visible nearby to buildings, walkways, driveways, gardens and other areas frequented by humans. Although they are solitary wasps, they form nesting aggregations in well-drained, light-textured soil in areas of full sunlight. Cicada killer wasp burrows can be identified by U-shaped mounds at the entrance.

Management of Cicada Killer Wasps

Homeowners may attempt to modify environments favorable to cicada killers because good locations become annual nesting grounds. Things that can be done in June to discourage burrowing include excessively watering the area, creating shade, changing soil type or increasing undesirable mulch. An insecticidal dust may be applied to the entrance of each nest, to contact the wasps entering and exiting the burrow. It is advised to treat at night when the female is in the burrow and the males are not active.



Left to Right: 1. Female with paralyzed cicada. 2. Burrows excavated under a plant. 3. Nest along edge of sidewalk. 4. Numerous nests in retaining wall.