

## Carpenter Bees are Buzzing

Just when we think the April fool's jokes and pranks are over, Mother Nature throws one in for good measure – carpenter bees. The only problem is that most of us are not laughing when we see the tell tale sign of holes being bored into our homes, decks, barns, and well, almost anything made of lumber. If I didn't know to tear off the March office calendar, I would be reminded that April is here just by the carpenter bee calls that come in.

Carpenter bees, as you probably know, are large, black and often confused with bumble bees. On a positive note, carpenter bees are much less aggressive than bumble bees. If you see them hovering around the outside of homes and barns, they are probably carpenter bees looking for mates and a good site to construct their nest. The bees often can startle you when they seem to dive down at your head in attack mode. Rarely, do we get stung by them, however. In fact, male carpenter bees have no stinger. Females do and can give a painful sting, but they are not aggressive unless they are handled or molested. If you have ever found yourself running across the yard in fear of being stung and the bee or bees are in hot pursuit, it's a bumblebee.

Carpenter bees nest in wood rather than in the ground like bumblebees and yellow jackets. There in lies the problem, since most of us don't enjoy holes being bored into our homes. The holes will be almost identical in size, about 3/8" in diameter. They prefer untreated and unpainted wood; the more weathered, the better they seem to like it. They also prefer softwoods like pine, cedar, or cypress. After boring into the wood a few inches, the tunnels take a 90 degree turn for a few more inches. It's in these side galleries where eggs are laid. After laying eggs, the female deposits balls of pollen for the larvae to eat. They then emerge as adults in late summer. Either new tunnels are made or females often reuse old ones. At any rate, the damage to wood over time can be extensive.

So what are options for controlling carpenter bees? Finding an insecticide to do the job is not difficult. The hard part comes under heading of labor. Most often these holes are being bored in places requiring ladders. There are several products that can be used. Liquid sprays of carbaryl or Sevin and any number of synthetic pyrethroids can be applied to wood surfaces. Residual effectiveness is not that long; maybe one to two weeks and then you'll have to reapply. For holes already bored, you can spray directly into them with liquids or perhaps you can find insecticide "puffers" for dust products. Leave the holes alone for a few days after treating to make sure bees come in contact with the product. Use wood filler or even wooden dowel rods coated with wood glue to fill the hole preventing reuse of the tunnel.

Finally, there's the option of arming your kids with badminton rackets or similar weapon of choice. Swatting down carpenter bees can provide hours of outdoor recreation and it's environmentally friendly.