

Honey Bees in the Neighborhood

Durham County Beekeepers Association

1) Is that a honey bee?



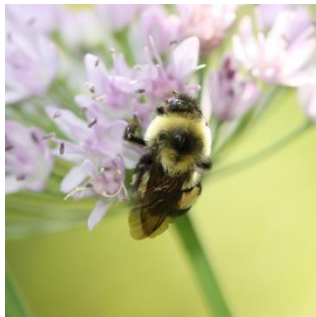
Honey bee

Fuzzy all over, stripes on abdomen clear but not sharply defined



Yellowjacket

No fuzz, strong yellow color, sharply defined stripes on abdomen



Bumblebee

Large, fuzzy back, loud buzz



Carpenter bee

Large, shiny back

2) Why are honey bees in my yard?

They are most likely collecting water. Though beekeepers generally provide honey bee-designed water sources near their hives, bees like natural, very shallow sources such as creeks, wet sand or mulch, water in potted plants, etc.

You might also see honey bees if you have pollinator-friendly plants blooming in your yard.

Fun fact: Honey bee hives consist of many thousands of bees. If you see what seems like a large number of honey bees in your yard—even a hundred—it’s not a swarm or a new hive. They are just foraging—collecting pollen, nectar, or water.

3) Are these honey bees from my neighbor's hives?

Maybe.

Honey bees can fly up to five miles, but they prefer to do their foraging for nectar, pollen, and water within a one-mile radius. Flowering trees offer the biggest volume of resources, which means the bees do most of their work above our heads, not in our yards.

There are quite a few backyard beekeepers scattered around the local area, so you are likely to see honey bees even if your immediate neighbors don’t keep hives.

4) What is a honey bee swarm?

In the spring, any honey bee colony that has survived the winter will want to reproduce. That means they want to make a new colony. To do that, about half the bees gorge themselves with honey from the hive and go out with their queen to find a new home. With plenty of food and no home to defend, they are very docile.

This is what it looks like when they leave their home colony—it’s like a cloud of bees.



Then, they rest someplace nearby—most commonly on a branch, but sometimes on a place that’s inconvenient for humans such as a gate or yard sign or the side mirror of a car. They send out scouts to look for a new home.



Beekeepers try to prevent swarms because they do not want to lose bees, but also because feral colonies only have a 1 in 10 chance of survival.

It's considered good luck to see an active swarm. Even some beekeepers have never seen one. Having a neighbor who keeps bees increases the chance that you may see a swarm, either because their own hives swarm, or because their yards are pollinator-friendly.

5) What do I do if I see a swarm?

Contact your neighborhood beekeeper OR [call the Durham County Beekeepers Swarm number \(919-627-3405\)](#).

6) Are honey bees aggressive?

No. Of all bees and wasps, honey bees are considered the most docile. That's one of the reasons that humans keep them. Honey bees naturally defend their hive, but only when the hive itself is threatened. If you are more than a couple of feet from the hive, honey bees are not defensive. Away from the hive, they occasionally sting if they are interrupted in the process of foraging, especially if someone steps on them or swats at them. They die immediately after stinging.

7) What if I get stung?

- ❖ First, assess your body's response. For most people, this is a briefly painful experience, but a few (about 2%) have an allergic reaction. If you have any trouble breathing, call 911 and use an epi pen if it's available.
- ❖ Next, remove the stinger by scraping across it with a credit card or table knife. Doing so quickly reduces the amount of venom that gets released into your skin. DO NOT try to pull the stinger out with fingers or tweezers; that would pump out more venom.
- ❖ Last, expect swelling and redness. This is a natural response and not an allergic reaction. Taking an antihistamine or pain reliever can help.



8) Does my mosquito treatment affect honey bees?

Yes. It affects all insects, including fireflies, butterflies, etc. There is no insecticide that targets mosquitoes only. Bee-friendly companies spray before or just after sunrise or sunset, and they use special nozzles to minimize drift into other yards.

9) What about yellow jackets?

Yellow jackets are aggressive if provoked. There are two main issues for humans:

- ❖ One individual can sting multiple times.

- ❖ They usually make their nests underground in places that are not regularly traveled. That means we tend to discover them by stepping on or mowing over them. They respond by using their primary defense mechanism: stinging. If you stumble upon a nest, follow your instinct to run away. They will calm down when you (the threat) aren't nearby.

Important facts about removing yellow jacket nests:

- ❖ Yellow jackets have a main entrance and at least one back exit to their hive. When we block or poison one entrance, the adult yellow jackets escape through the other. They then establish a new colony somewhere close by. So if you find a nest and try to eradicate it, watch out for places that they may try to make a new colony.
- ❖ Yellow jackets are pollinators with a role to play in our ecosystem. Unless they nest or forage at a very inconvenient location, i.e. by your front door, it's best to leave them be. Calling a professional is a good way to deal with them if they are a problem.

10) What if I want to learn more?

Check out the [Durham Beekeepers website](#) for more information. You're welcome to join one of our monthly meetings!