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Common Name: **Paper wasps; umbrella wasps**
Scientific Name: ***Polistes* species.**

PAPER WASPS



1

2

3



Nest

Introduction. Paper wasps get their common name from the paperlike material of which they construct their nests. They are also known as umbrella wasps based on the shape of their nests. In the urban situation, these usually non-aggressive wasps are a nuisance pest. Three species are common in Ohio.

Recognition. Adults measure 3/4 to 1 inch long. Depending on the species the body may be colored in combinations of black, yellow, brown and orange. The wings are dusky-colored. These wasps have a long-legged appearance.

Similar Wasps. • Yellowjackets and hornets (subfamily Vespinae) have a wider abdomen, where joined to the thorax, and have shorter legs. • Potter and mason wasps (subfamily Eumeninae) usually are smaller and mostly black with yellow or ivory markings on the thorax and front of the abdomen. • Spider wasps (Pompilidae) are mostly black, including the wings; some have orange wings.

Representative Species (shown above).

1. Northern paper wasp, *Polistes fuscatus* (1), measures 3/4 to 1 inch long and is brown and orange with some yellow markings.
2. Metricus paper wasp, *Polistes metricus* (2), measures 1 inch long and is mostly black and brown.

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3. *Dominulus* paper wasp, *Polistes dominulus* (3), measures 2/3 to 1 inch long and is marked and banded with yellow and black. This species was introduced from Western Europe (via freight ships) to the U.S. in 1984 and made its way into Ohio in 1992. It is often mistaken for a yellowjacket.

Biology. Paper wasps are semi-social, existing in small colonies but without a true worker caste. Overwintering inseminated queens begin building nests in the spring. These founding queens are often joined by other inseminated females which assist in nest building and maintenance. Such secondary queens become functional workers and relegate egg laying to the founding queen. However, should the founding/dominant queen die, one of the secondaries can assume egg laying and assure that the nest will survive. Fertile daughter wasps that are bred through the summer also become functional workers.

Nests consist of a single layer of paper maché comb with the cells opening downward. This comb is suspended from a branch or sheltered structural surface or suspended by a paper stalk. This comb is never enclosed by an envelope, but remains naked. A single egg is laid in each cell and the developing larvae is fed primarily protein from insect prey through the open cell. The cell is capped when the larva is ready to pupate. Nests are small to moderate in size, containing 150 to 250 cells by autumn.

Habits. Paper wasps hang their comb nests from twigs and branches of trees and shrubs which can cause concern when ornamental shrubs and hedges are trimmed or fruit is being picked from trees. If a nest is contacted, there is high probability that person doing the trimming or fruit picking will get stung. Paper wasps also attach their comb nests from porch ceilings, the top member of window and door frames, soffits, eaves, attic rafters, deck floor joists and railings, and similar protected and recessed surfaces.

Cultural Control & Precautionary Measures. Before trimming shrubs or hedges or picking fruit, check the plant for paper wasp nests and treat and remove any found before proceeding. Active nests should be avoided until they have been professionally treated. Inactive/abandoned nests can be removed. Note: paper wasps removed alive with a vacuum cleaner often survive and can crawl back out the hose, resulting in additional risks.

The mated female wasps often overwinter in wall and ceiling voids of homes and buildings. They may enter the living and work spaces of buildings through skylight casings, fireplaces, drop ceiling panels, utility penetrations, recessed canister light fixtures and ventilation duct penetrations. These and similar potential entry points should be checked and excluded, if possible, to prevent accidental contact with wasps on sunny / warm days in winter and early spring. If the entry points cannot be found, a Varmant Guard technician will assist in the investigation and remediation process.

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Professional Control. Paper wasps are beneficial insects, helping to control many insect and spider pests. If their nest is located near human activity, control is warranted. It is essential that the adults be contacted and killed using a liquid residual or pyrethroid aerosol insecticide or they will quickly rebuild. Nests may not be removed from structural surfaces on the day of treatment by the technician in order to allow maximum exposure to insecticide residues on the nests upon return of the foraging paper wasps.