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Types of Bees & Wasps in Massachusetts

There are many species of bees and wasps in Massachusetts, and they come in a wide variety of sizes, shapes, and colors. Some are social, and others are solitary. Here are some commonly observed species and groups of species.

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Social Bees

Bumblebees (genus *Bombus*)





These familiar insects are stocky, fuzzy, and yellow (or orange) and black. The queen bumblebee typically chooses a nest site that is on or under the ground. She lays her eggs, and 10 days later a relatively small number of worker bees is born. These workers gather nectar and pollen, make honey, and care for the nest and young. In the late summer, drones (males) and queens are born, and they mate. Most of the colony dies with the onset of cold weather, but the queens overwinter in leaf litter.

A group of parasitic “cuckoo” bumblebees of the subgenus *Psithyrus* lay their eggs in *Bombus* nests. When a parasitic female enters a *Bombus* nest, she may attack and kill the queen, though in some cases the two will coexist. Her young are reared by *Bombus* workers.

European Honeybees (*Apis mellifera*)



Imported from Europe for their honey, beeswax, and pollination abilities, these familiar bees are black and gold. Much of our honeybee population lives in beekeepers' hives, and the rest build nests in tree cavities and in the eaves and walls of buildings. Each hive consists of a queen (who lays the eggs), female workers (who gather food and maintain the nest), and male drones (who mate with new queens). If a young queen returns to the nest after a mating flight, the old queen will gather a swarm of hundreds of workers and leave the nest to start a new colony.

Solitary Bees

Carpenter Bees (*Xylocopa virginica* and other species)





These insects look like bumblebees, but they have a completely black, shiny, hairless abdomen (the rear section). They mate in April or May. The female carpenter bee starts looking for a suitable nest site, such as weathered areas on buildings, fences, or telephone poles, and people often report seeing them hovering around buildings. She chews into the wood and lays her

eggs. Adult carpenter bees emerge in August but return to the nest to overwinter. Carpenter bees seldom pose a threat to humans, as they rarely sting. However, their nest tunnels occasionally cause minor damage to wooden buildings.

Sweat Bees (family Halictidae)



Many, but not all, sweat bees are solitary. Their name comes from their attraction to human perspiration. These small, fuzzy bees come in several colors, but many of them are metallic green. They nest in the ground or in wood.

Mining Bees (family Andrenidae)



These bees are typically hairy and brown or black. They dig burrows along dirt paths and in other places with sparse vegetation.

Social Wasps

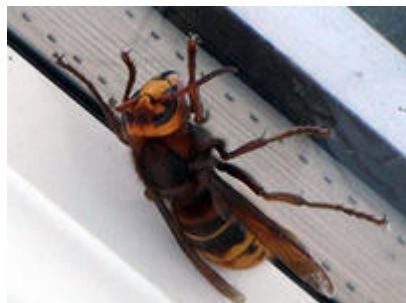
Bald-faced Hornets (*Dolichovespula maculata*)



They are black and white (or yellowish-white), with a white face and white stripe at the end of the abdomen, and can grow over an inch long. Their gray, papery nest is often found hanging from a tree branch or under building overhangs. Larval bald-faced hornets are fed insects, and adults consume nectar and fruit juices as well as some insects. This species can be very

aggressive, and will defend its nest with a painful sting.

Giant Hornets (*Vespa crabro*)



True to their name, giant hornets are large (up to 1.5”) and brown with yellow markings. Also known as European hornets, these insects were introduced from Europe in the 1800s. They’re mostly found in southern Massachusetts. Their nests, built in the hollow of a tree or in a structure like a porch or deck, consist of layers of combs within an outer covering. Adults

mostly eat nectar and insects, and they will bite into fruit to drink the juice. The young are fed pre-chewed insects. Members of this species are very defensive of their nests and can deliver an extremely painful sting.

Yellow Jackets (*Vespyla* species)



You may have seen these insects buzzing around your picnic. They are closely related to hornet but are much smaller and are boldly striped in black and yellow. Also, they waver from side to side before landing. Yellow jackets build their nests underground, in the hollows of trees, or in the walls of buildings when there is an opening or crack in which to enter. They can be a

nuisance at the picnic table. Give their nests plenty of space, as they can aggressively defend with a painful sting.

Paper Wasps (*Polistes fuscatus*)



These wasps build small, single-comb paper nests that are open from the bottom and hang from trees and shrubs or from the eaves or ceilings of buildings. The adults feed on nectar, but the larvae are fed insects. Females often come into homes as cold weather sets in. They are also fond of the food at picnic tables, but are more tranquil than yellow jackets.

Solitary Wasps

Mud Daubers (*Sphecidae* or *Crabronidae* family)



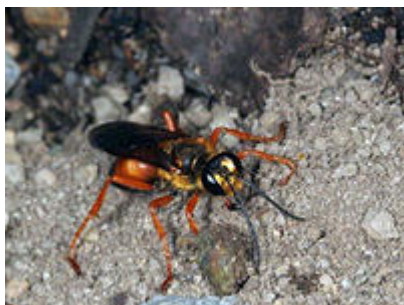
Three species of these long, slender wasps can be found in Massachusetts. Black and yellow mud daubers (*Sceliphron caementarium*) and organ-pipe mud daubers (*Trypoxylon politum*)—which are black-colored—build mud nests for their young, often on sheltered parts of buildings. Blue mud daubers (*Chalybion californicum*) are parasitic, and they're often found drinking water from puddles; they use the water to soften the nests of other mud daubers and break in. Then, they remove the eggs, insert their own, and reseal the opening.

Sand Wasps (*Bembix americana*, *Bembix pruinosa*)



These wasps have large eyes and black-and-white-striped abdomens. Although they are considered solitary, dozens of females will gather in a sandy area to excavate individual nests and scare away intruders. The female digs a burrow in the sand, lays a single egg, and brings prey (usually flies) for the developing larva.

Great Golden Digger Wasps (*Sphex ichneumonea*)



These insects' legs and half of their abdomens are reddish orange, and they can grow to be 1" long. The female digs an underground nest, provisions it with one or more paralyzed grasshoppers, deposits a single egg, then seals the opening and departs. The young overwinter in the nest and emerge the following year.

Cicada Killer (*Sphecius speciosus*)



These insects are very large—they can grow up to 2” long. They have a thick body, and are reddish brown or black with dull yellow stripes on the thorax and abdomen. True to their name, they hunt for cicadas, flying high above tree trunks and branches. The female cicada killer digs a burrow in an open area, provisions it with two or three cicadas for her offspring to feed

on, and then seals the opening and flies off.

Situations & Solutions

It’s important for people to coexist with bees and wasps, which provide invaluable services to ecosystems and sustain our food production systems. Learn what to do in case of a sting, and how to minimize your risk, as well as what to do if you discover a colony in an undesirable spot. **[Learn More \[http://www.massaudubon.org/learn/nature-wildlife/insects-arachnids/bees-wasps/situations-solutions\]](http://www.massaudubon.org/learn/nature-wildlife/insects-arachnids/bees-wasps/situations-solutions)**

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