

Carpenter Bees Create Unwanted Holes in Homes



Kansas State University Extension Photo

Larry Williams, the author, is Extension Horticulture Agent with the UF-IFAS Extension in Okaloosa County.

March 2004

March usually brings the first sightings of the carpenter bee in north Florida. Carpenter bees are the large, black and yellow bees often seen hovering around

the eaves of a house, wooden fences or the underside of a deck on warm days. They are occasionally mistaken for bumblebees but differ in that they have a black shiny abdomen in contrast to the yellow abdomen of the bumble bee.

Dr. Richard Sprenkel, UF/IFAS Entomologist at the North Florida Research and Education Center in Quincy, shares the following information on this often asked about wood boring bee.

Carpenter bees spend the winter as adults within their old nest tunnels. After emerging in the spring, the adults mate and the female begins excavating a gallery with her mandibles (mouthparts) at the rate of one inch in six days. The gallery has a clean-cut round entrance hole that may be up to 1/2 inch in diameter. The gallery continues inward for one to two inches, then turns sharply at a ninety-degree right angle running in the same direction as the wood grain for four to six inches. Damage from a pair of bees is slight but if the gallery is used over several years, damage can be extensive. To make problems worse, woodpeckers such as the pileated woodpecker, will often peck away at the wood to get to the larvae inside, causing considerable damage.

Once the gallery is completed the female begins to provision a brood cell with bee bread (mixture of pollen and regurgitated nectar). After laying an egg on top of the mass the female closes the cell with chewed wood pulp. Each female may have six to eight sealed brood cells in a linear row in one gallery as she backs outward. Larvae develop on the pollen/nectar food mass provided with the life cycle completed in thirty to forty days.

After the new adults chew through the cell partitions and emerge, they collect and store pollen in the existing galleries, which they use for hibernation during the winter. The previous year's adults die. They are not social insects and there is one generation per year. Males do not drill tunnels but they are territorial and will harass other bees and people who venture near their protected areas.

The males, which can be distinguished from females by a whitish spot on the front of the face, do not sting. Females are capable of stinging but rarely do so unless confined in your hand or are highly agitated

Carpenter bees prefer to attack wood that is bare, weathered and unpainted. Therefore, the best way to deter

Carpenter Bees Create Unwanted Holes in Homes

the bees is to paint all exposed wood surfaces, especially those that have a history of being attacked. Wood stains and preservatives are less reliable than painting but will provide some degree of repellency versus bare wood.

Preventive sprays applied to wood surfaces are effective only for a short period, meaning that you would have to repeat the application about every two to three weeks. However, once nesting activity has begun treating the entrance holes with an insecticidal spray or dust may substantially reduce damage. Products containing carbaryl (Sevin), cyfluthrin, or resmethrin are suitable.

 visits since 3-17-04