

Bug-Wise

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Paper Wasps: Paper wasps are social insects that build papery, single tiered nests using wood fibers they collect from exposed wood surfaces. When they are out collecting wood for nest material or foraging for food, individual wasps are not aggressive and only sting if they are accidentally pressed against the skin in some way: get trapped in clothing, tangled in hair, etc. But they will readily defend their nests and most of us have experienced this defensive response on more than one occasion. In most cases, you did not disturb the nest intentionally; you just did not know it was there and got too close while working or playing in the area.

Paper wasps overwinter as mated queens, usually in some protected site such as a hollow tree, attic, barn, or storage shed. Attics that aren't effectively screened and sealed often shelter hundreds of overwintering wasps. These wasps leave their overwintering site in the spring to begin building a nest. Paper wasps build their nests in an above ground site that is somewhat sheltered and protected from rainfall: under eaves of buildings, in dense shrubs, in infrequently used equipment, and other protected sites.

Several species of paper wasps occur in Mississippi, but the two most common are a large red and black wasp, *Polistes metricus* and, and a smaller brown and yellow wasp, *Polistes exclamans*. *P. exclamans* are often mistakenly referred to as yellowjackets, but yellowjackets nest in the ground and are yellow and black. Through much of Mississippi, *P. exclamans* are often called 'Guinea wasps'. This is a much better name for these wasps, though this is not an official common name.

Most Mississippians know the big red and black wasps, as 'red wasps', though again, this is not an official common name, and there are other species of wasps that are called 'red wasps' in other parts of the country. *P. carolinia*, sometimes called the 'Carolina paper wasp' is another paper wasp sometimes seen in the state. It is about the same size as *P. metricus*, but the body is uniformly burnt-orange with black wings. This wasp prefers to build its nest in more protected locations than the other two species.

When these founding Unlike baldfaced hornets and yellowjackets, paper wasp nests only have a single tier of paper cells. The nest increases in size as more cells are added around the outer edge. The more cells a nest has, the more wasps it can produce. By the end of the season, nests can have many dozens of adult wasps. 'Get in' a wasp nest in April, and you may get stung once or twice. The situation

Blake Layton, Extension Entomology Specialist

Extension Entomology Contacts in Mississippi

Specialist	Primary Contact for insect pests of:	Phone Number	E-mail	Location
Dr. Blake Layton	Home Ornamentals {S} Home Lawns {S} Home Vegetables {S} Household Insects {S} Insect Identification {S} Master Gardner Entomology {S} Commercial Pest Control {S} Commercial Veggies. {S} (except sweetpotatoes)	662-325-2085	blayton@entomology.msstate.edu	MSU, Department of Entomology
Dr. Angus Catchot	Cotton {S} Soybeans {S} Wheat {S}	662-325-2085	acatchot@entomology.msstate.edu	MSU, Department of Entomology
Dr. David Held	Commercial Turf {S} Commercial Ornamentals {S} Home Orn./Lawns/Vegs/Household Pests In Coastal MS {A}	228-546-1019	dheld@ext.msstate.edu	Biloxi, Coastal R&E Center
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{S} = Statewide assignment {A} = Area assignment

The above assignments show which scientist has primary responsibility for each area.

You can contact area entomology specialists for any insect problem located in their geographic area.