

July 25, 2004

NEWS RELEASE FROM THE OFFICE OF:

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COUNTY EXTENSION AGENT
GREGG COUNTY**

CICADA KILLER WASPS

Our office has received numerous phone calls this past week on an extremely large wasp that is nesting in a hole in the ground. These are not Africanized Bees or “Killer Bees.” Africanized bees look just like our native bees, except they are extremely aggressive. The Cicada Killers are actually one of the beneficial insects

Although female Cicada Killer Wasps rarely sting unless disturbed, homeowners may become alarmed or frightened because of their very large size and foraging habits in unwanted areas. The wasps become a nuisance when they dig holes in lawns, flower beds, gardens and golf courses, kicking out a six to eight inch diameter horseshoe-shaped pile of soil around the entrance. The male has especially aggressive territorial behavior, but does not sting. Females if bothered can give a painful sting. Normally the female wasps are not aggressive and control is rarely needed except in unwanted places.

These wasps are very different than the social wasp (hornets, yellow jackets and paper wasps). Cicada killer females use their sting to paralyze their prey, cicadas, rather than to defend their nests. The wasps feed on flower nectar while the immature or larval stage feeds primarily upon cicadas that are brought to the burrow by the adult.

These wasps are commonly seen in the summer flying around the lawn, shrubs and trees searching for cicadas. Cicadas are captured, paralyzed by their sting and taken back to feed the young. Cicadas are very large insects, sometimes called “locusts.” They sing extremely loud in trees during the summer.

Cicada killers over winter as larvae in the soil. Pupation occurs in the spring and adult emerges in mid-June to early July. Emergence continues throughout the summer. Females feed, mate, and dig burrows for several weeks before preying on cicadas.

There may be many individuals flying over a lawn, but each female digs her own burrow six to ten inches deep and one-half inch wide. The ground burrowing wasp may be found in sandy soils to loose clay in bare or grass covered banks, berms, hills as well as raised sidewalks, driveways and patio slabs. Some may nest in planters, window boxes, flower beds, under shrubs, ground cover, etc. Nests usually are made in the full sun where vegetation is sparse and the soil is well drained.

If control of these wasps is necessary due to the location of children’s play area or if there is an extremely large number of flying around in search of cicadas; the following control measures should help. You can apply carbaryl (Sevin), dust into and around the nest entrance. If the entire lawn is infested you may try a spray of the same product over the entire infested

area. Repeat treatments may be needed. The best time for applying any insecticide to the wasp nests is after dark when the female wasps are in their nest and it should be cooler. Always be extremely careful when working around wasps.

Remember, before using any insecticide, always read and follow all label directions and precautions.

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Extension programs serve people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, religion, disability, or national origin.