

Roses

August is a good time to cut back hybrid tea and grandiflora roses for a September bloom. Autumn is just around the corner, although it might not feel like that just yet.

Termites and Shade Trees

Do termites feed on landscape trees, causing injury? The short answer is no.

Termites are social insects living in colonies, and found wherever the annual temperature is 50°F or above. At least 69 species exist which can be divided into four broad groups, but only the subterranean and drywood termite groups are found in Kern County. Winged ants superficially resemble termites, but the rear wing of a termite is about the same size as the front wing, the waist is not much smaller than the mid-body and the antennae are not elbowed. Ants have a smaller rear wing than front wing, elbowed antennae, and a very narrow waist where the abdomen attaches. Carpenter ants are found in wooded areas and sometimes get into homes, but definitely resemble other ants. They build nests in wood but do not eat wood as termites do. Powder post beetles tunnel in wood, but produce very fine sawdust unlike the coarse pellets of termites.

Subterranean termites must maintain contact with the ground to do damage to wood. Insects can enter directly into wood if wood rests on soil, or tunnels of soil called chimneys reach from the soil to exposed wood. Subterranean termites are much more destructive than drywood termites, creating an extensive gallery system in wood beams and traveling from board to board. One control strategy is to break the contact with the ground, a standard practice in construction accomplished by a concrete slab foundation. Soil beneath the foundation or in a crawl space could also be treated with an insecticide. It is rare to find subterranean termites in trees, because dead wood on the exterior of the tree in contact with soil would be required.

Drywood termites do not need contact with soil, and can therefore colonize wood well above-ground. They can fly into buildings, often in the autumn, and are often found in wood window frames or other exposed wood. They remain where they first invaded and usually stay in the same board. Bits of sawdust-like frass can be seen around the colonized area approximately three years after colony establishment. Control methods include drilling holes to reach the feeding sites and injecting an insecticide, or in cases of heavy infestation, a building can be tented and fumigated. Drywood termites can often be found in shade trees where large pruning cuts afford access to dead tissue in the heart of a tree. Older sapwood (xylem) is no longer alive and can be a food source for these insects; however, termites feed only on dead wood and do not injure living tissue. Topical chemical treatments are generally ineffective because the chemical is not able to penetrate the dead

wood in sufficient concentration to affect the termites. Systemic insecticides cannot move in dead tissue, and are therefore also ineffective against termites living in trees.

Wasps

There are two kinds of stinging wasps common in Kern County. As summer progresses, the colony sizes become greater and encounters with humans more likely. Polistes wasps, *Polistes* spp., are so-called paper wasps because they build nests out of paper-like material they produce by chewing on wood and bringing the wood fibers to the nesting site. The nests are shaped like an inverted umbrella, and can be found attached to tree branches or under eaves. The nests are usually 5-15 ft above ground, and may not be noticed until disturbed by an activity such as pruning or picking fruit. Polistes wasps aggressively defend the nest and can sting repeatedly. At the beginning, the nest is only about the size of a quarter-dollar, but can become the size of a dinner plate with a corresponding increase in number of defenders. The wasps are considered to be beneficial insects since they feed on lawn insects such as caterpillars. However, they are also attracted to sugary substances and water, such as leftover sodas, ripened fruit damaged by birds, buckets with irrigation water left behind, or swimming pools. Stepping on a wasp (barefoot) is probably the second-most common type of incident that results in a sting. The wasps themselves are red-brown with yellow interspersed, about 1½ inches in length, and fly with their hind legs trailing, resembling landing gear on an airplane. Like all wasps, they have a narrow thread-like waist.



If polistes wasps become a nuisance, it is best to find the nest and remove it. Although these wasps are not active at night, they will respond to disturbance. They respond more slowly if temperatures are cool, but that is quite unlikely during a Kern County summer. Aerosol sprays that can reach 10-15 ft are available at home and garden stores. The sprays usually contain a pyrethroid that is very fast-acting and provides knock-down, but there is no guarantee that every wasp will be stopped. Treating the nest around sunset will likely be more effective than other times of day since the wasps return for the night. Caution is the watchword when using one of these sprays and be sure to follow label directions.

“Meat bees” or western yellowjackets, *Vespula* spp., are common in the foothill areas. These are 3/8 – 1/2 inch in length, so smaller than polistes wasps, and are bright yellow with black interspersed. They’re agile fliers and can capture flying insects. They feed on protein as well as sugary substances. Unlike the paper wasps, they nest in the ground, and so finding and eliminating the nest is



difficult. Bait stations (shown at right), available at home and garden stores, work well for collecting the flying wasps around houses and picnic areas. Meat bees remember where they found food in the past and they'll come back to that location, so keeping garbage cans sealed and cleaning up food sources will help keep them at a distance.

For more information, please see the Pest Notes found at ipm.ucanr.edu, including *Bees and Wasps* and *Bee and Wasp Stings Management Guidelines*.

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Disclaimer: Discussion of research findings necessitates using trade names. This does not constitute product endorsement, nor does it suggest products not listed would not be suitable for use. Some research results included involve use of chemicals which are currently registered for use or may involve use which would be considered out of label. These results are reported but are not a recommendation from the University of California for use. Consult the label and use it as the basis of all recommendations.

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