

## **Garden Friend: Wasps**

There are several varieties of wasps which are useful in the garden. Some are predators and some are parasitic. Predators include the Paper Wasps, Mud Wasps, Ground Wasps, and Flower Wasps.

You might have seen at some time, a large orange colored wasp with a conspicuously slender waist and black band at it's rear, walking around a patch of wet earth, collecting ball of mud to take to its mud nest, which it builds on the side of the house or shed. If you open one of their nests, you'll find small caterpillars inside which have been paralyzed by a bit from the wasp, but are alive, so that they are there to feed the wasp's larvae, when they emerge from the eggs.

Then we have the paper wasp which I'm sure you're familiar with, because I can imagine you have been stung when you have disturbed a nest in the garden, which has been cleverly concealed from view. These nests are usually round and are attached to a branch by a thin stalk and have separate cells of paper-thin walls to hold their larvae, hence the name Paper Wasp. Sometimes the nests are elongated, almost like sticks hanging from a twig. These wasps clean up caterpillars, spiders, and aphids.

The Ground Wasp burrows in the ground, and it also cleans up the pests which I have mentioned.

Flower Wasps are large, hairy, and bright blue. I was told to look out for these particular wasps as they hover over the lawn when the caterpillars are in the lawn, and that is the time to spray with Carbaryl.

Now the parasitic wasps come in different sizes from the large Ichneumonids, medium sized Braconids and smaller Chalcid wasps. The larger parasitic wasps insert one or more eggs into each caterpillar, depending on the size of the caterpillar, which acts as the host to the developing egg. The caterpillar lives on until it reaches the pupal stage and by then the wasp egg inside has developed into a wasp which cuts a hole through the case and emerges so destroying the developing pupa and preventing it becoming a moth. The smaller parasitic wasps insert their egg inside another host egg usually those belonging to the leaf eating insects such as bugs and beetles. However, if we keep our eyes open, we will find lots of interesting things happening out in our gardens. Please don't reach for the spray can when you see a nest of wasps unless you may be bitten whilst you're pruning a shrub. They are very useful friends in the garden. In case you're bitten by a wasp, vinegar is very good to use on the bite. Remember the old blue bag?