

Every summer, wasps come out of hibernation and clash with people. Dorval entomologist Paul Maloney has developed an eco-friendly but deadly method of disposing of the critters and their nests

Bug doctor gets wasps to buzz off

MONIQUE BEAUDIN
THE GAZETTE

The house was abuzz — hundreds of wasps had infested a Côte St. Luc home, swarming the living and laundry rooms and sending the family fleeing to the front stoop for safety.

Enter Paul Maloney, a Dorval entomologist who calls himself the Eco Bug Doctor. He uses environmentally friendly techniques — like a deadly mix of water and dishwashing soap — to get rid of pesky bugs.

"Someone took the initiative to block the entrance to the nest from outside, and they ended up dispersing all the wasps inside the house," Maloney recalled.

He and his teenage son sucked up the wasps with a vacuum-like device and destroyed the nest — without either of them being stung.

It was a typical day's work for Maloney who wears a beekeeper's suit as his uniform and likes to take home really big wasp nests as trophies. He takes the dead wasps home, too, and feeds them to sparrows and carpenter ants around his house.

It might be a bit much for sphero-phobics — people who have a fear of wasps — but to Maloney, the yellow-and-black insects that are swarming the city again are not a summer nuisance. They're actually good bugs, he says, because they eat caterpillars and spiders and are a nutritious food source for animals like skunks, wildcats and the bees.

"If the nest is in a position where the wasps don't bother you, it's best to leave them, really," he suggested. "People should see wasps as part of the biodiversity in their environment."

This is prime time for wasps. Wasp season began in the spring when the queens came out of hibernation, started new nests and began laying eggs. As the summer progresses, the nests get larger as the larvae grow into worker wasps and begin searching for food for new larvae.

"As they get bigger, they seem to become a lot more aggressive," Maloney said.

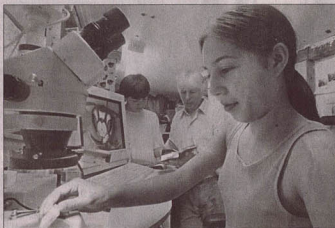
While wasp stings are painful, they can be deadly to people with allergies. A normal reaction to a sting is some pain, redness and swelling on the skin near the bite. Symptoms of an allergic reaction are more severe and can even kill people. Research has shown that between one and five per cent of wasp and bee stings provoke an allergic reaction. This summer, a Montreal city worker died from a wasp sting while pruning a tree.

Wasps nest in different places — trees, hedges, in holes in buildings, even the ground. Although most people see their nests outside, they can also make their way inside



PHOTOS: DAVE SIDAWAY THE GAZETTE

Entomologist Paul Maloney, who calls himself the Eco Bug Doctor, shows off a trophy-size wasp nest. He likes to take home some of the biggest nests — and feeds the dead wasps to sparrows and carpenter ants around his house.



Paul Maloney's business is a family affair; both his son Tim and daughter Laurel help him out.

buildings

Maloney said he recently had a case in Pierrefonds where wasps crawled through a hole for a wire outside a house and built their nest between the ceiling beams above the family's washing machine.

Wasps sting as a defence, usually to protect their nest, said Maloney, who recently was stung twice on the ankle while removing a nest in a compost heap. But sometimes people get stung by stepping on them or being hit by one. Wasps even sting

when they're dead.

When it comes to stinging, wasps are special, Maloney said. They release a pheromone when they sting that attracts other wasps, he said.

"As you're running, you've got that little flag of perfume on you, so they follow you," he said.

Maloney deals with wasps by spraying a solution of 90 per cent water and 10 per cent dish soap into the entrance of the nest, trapping the insects inside. The nest turns to mush, and the wasps die within 30 seconds, he said.

Maloney has been providing ecological alternatives for pest management for the past four years, turning Eco Bug Doctor into a full-time job. His says his goal is to "exterminate the exterminators" who use chemical pesticides to rid of insects.

"I think what they're doing is criminal," he said. "It's very unfortunate that they go around polluting our environment and potentially harming our children with the products they use."

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How to avoid wasp stings

If a wasp is bothering you,

don't make any sudden moves.

If wasp lands on you, wait for it to

leave by itself or gently sho it away.

If you disturb a nest, get away

as quickly as possible.

If you're on a picnic, keep any meat

and sweet food in closed containers.

Keep an eye on your and your

children's food and drink, making

sure there are no wasps in it before

you consume it.

Wear long-sleeved tops and pants,

and tie your hair back.

Don't walk around in bare feet,

as some species nest underground.

If a wasp flies into your car, open win-

dows and it will fly away on its own.

If you find a wasp nest, call in a pro-

fessional exterminator. Contact your

municipality if it's on public property.

SOURCE: MONTREAL INSECTARIUM