

eastern yellow jacket

Vespula maculifrons

FEATURES

The eastern yellow jacket is a common wasp and familiar, unmatched picnic pest. They are only distinguished by other *Vespula* by small differences in the small, black triangle at the top of the abdomen where it meets the thorax. They range in length from one-half to three-quarters of an inch; workers and males being smaller than the Queen.

BEHAVIORS

They are a social wasp; living and defending aggressively the underground nests they build in yards, golf courses, and alongside creek banks. There are three social categories within a colony: a queen, workers, and males. Very little is known about mating behavior, but they mate in the fall. Females hibernate over the winter, clinging to a surface free from the elements. In spring and early summer, queen yellow jackets build a small nest where they rear a small brood which will become the first workers. During the spring and summer, the mostly sterile workers forage for food and feed larvae, while the queen and the few males within a colony reproduce. A colony may have one or more egg-laying queens. Nests are not typically reused second year. They are found statewide.

TAXONOMY

Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Arthropoda
Class: Insecta
Order: Hymenoptera
Family: Vespidae

ILLINOIS STATUS

common, native

ILLINOIS RANGE





Photo by MDC Staff, courtesy Missouri Department of Conservation

Aquatic Habitats

none

Woodland Habitats

coniferous forests; southern Illinois lowlands; upland deciduous forests

Prairie and Edge Habitats

black soil prairie; dolomite prairie; edge; gravel prairie; hill prairie; sand prairie; shrub prairie