



Barnyard Visitors

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Heat... humidity... torrential downpours of rain... welcome to Ohio! I still have some plants in my staging area (under the carport) that I haven't stuck in the ground because I feared their sudden death from the heat! Maybe I can sneak out during a break in the rain and finally get them planted! My Queen-of-the-Prairie (*Filipendula rubra*) actually bloomed its little heart out in my staging area. I hope that it will be as happy once it is in the ground.

This past week I ventured out in the heat to take a quick "walk about" to check for plant pests and diseases as well as critter damage.

I find it hard to believe that some deer prefer my tough blue Hosta leaves to the tender soy bean leaves in the nearby field. As I opened the barn door I looked up and was amazed to see large hornet nest attached to our barn! Last year they constructed a nest in one of our Norway Spruce trees in a less conspicuous place. We haven't been bothered by the nest builders, so we have just left it alone.

According to the Penn State Entomology Department, the Baldfaced Hornet (*Dolichovespula maculata*) is an 'aerial yellow jacket'-one of 7 or 8 species in the genus *Dolichovespula* in North America. However, it is not a 'true' hornet – it is a yellow jacket. All of the yellow jackets in the genus *Dolichovespula* build nests in bushes and trees (sometimes on the outside of buildings), and produce the characteristic football shaped, grey papery nests. The Baldfaced hornet is found in most of the 48 contiguous states and D.C., throughout Canada and in Alaska.

The Baldfaced hornet gets its name from the ivory-white markings on the face. The thorax, legs and abdomen also have white markings. The queen and her offspring range in size from 13 mm to 20 mm – the queen is usually the largest yellow jacket in the colony.

In the spring, fertilized queens that have overwintered in protected places such as in hollow trees, rock piles, under bark and in the walls and attics of buildings, become active and begin to build a nest. The queen collects cellulose from weathered and rotting wood, chews the wood adding her saliva, and takes this paste and makes a papery material to construct the nest. She creates a few brood cells within the nest and deposits eggs in them and feed the larvze when they hatch. This first brood will assume the duties of nest building, food collection, feeding the larvae and protecting the nest. As the summer progresses, the colony grows until there may be 100 to 400 workers. Early in the spring and summer, protein in the form of live prey is the usual diet consisting of flies, other yellow jackets and many other types of insects. Some nests are so full of yellow jacket remains that the inside has a yellowish cast to it. As the season progresses and there are fewer larvae to feed, the workers will take nectar and other forms of carbohydrates. Most of the colony, other than newly fertilized potential queens that will overwinter, will die before or shortly after the first hard frost.



In a past *OSUE Buckeye Yard and Garden Line*, contributor, Joe Boggs, shares that Baldfaced hornets are considered beneficial insects despite their painful stinging behavior. Like other yellow jackets and many wasps found in Ohio, hornets are highly accomplished predators. A hornet's nest can have a considerable impact on the local caterpillar pest population including bagworms. Efforts to control hornets should be limited to nests that present a clear and present danger to homeowners.

Last year's nest (8 feet up in the Norway spruce) was destroyed by "critter looters". I am assuming it was raccoons looking for a tasty midnight snack. The design of this year's nest was close to a downspout and I am afraid that the same outcome is inevitable.

I was thankful to have a break from the daily watering of the Herb containers on the deck. Even the cucumber vines perked up after the last rainfall. I am finding tooth marks on some of my low-hanging tomatoes, so I am following Susan Barber's advice to pick those at "first blush". They will continue to ripen on my counter safely tucked away from hungry little mouths.

The count-down to the Brown County Fair is on. The theme of our fair booth this year is **Natural Landscaping in Your Own Backyard**. We hope you will stop by for a visit to learn how reducing your lawn size can conserve water, save you time and money and provide habitat and food for wildlife and pollinators.



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