

Bad Year for Ground Bees

by Ken Ingram

Everyone has been talking about ground bees this spring. I used to see them at Columbia; Port America has them also, and Lee Dieter says they are the worst he's ever seen them at Washington Golf since he started there in 1892.

I've been a beekeeper for a few years and always had a few hives around the course, so if anyone even *saw* a bee, let alone got stung, it was my fault: "one of Kenny's bees." (When it starts getting bad everything is your fault.) Ground Bees are good guys, beneficial pollinators and not aggressive at all, but try telling that to Mrs. Flatbush.

Dr. Lee Helman of the University of Maryland helped me write this, so consult with him for further information.

These insects belong to the *Andrenidae* family, commonly called ground or burrowing bees. Yes, Mrs. Flatbush, they do possess a stinger and reportedly have a mild sting, but I don't believe it. They overwinter as larvae in the ground. Males emerge first in early spring. When females emerge later and fly through the swarms of males to mate they appear aggressive. That's just when Mrs. Flatbush shanks one right in the middle of their nesting area.

Ground Bees are usually a problem in the same location every year. They seem to prefer mounds or slopes with very thin topsoil. Their burrowing brings up lower pH subsoils, often a different color, and thin turf is always the result. Females can make 15-20 burrows which are lined with a pollen/nectar product on which


decreases in June and they seem to disappear by July, just like *Poa annua*.

Several insecticides control Ground Bees, all work better if watered in. Granular dylox works great, kind of saturation bombing technique down the holes. The new synthetic pyrethroids reportedly are very effective. Also, try to lime, fertilize, and seed these spots in the fall and irrigate them to maintain good turf. I know, it's easier to nuke them. In late May this year we rototilled one of these areas and planted a wildflower mix. Four men raking and grading with bees flying everywhere and no one got stung.

Well as soon as the Ground Bees are controlled the Cicada Killers come out on bunker banks. You know, those Giant Yellow Jackets. You figure if one of these guys stings you it's all over. Put a couple of these babies in Mrs. Flatbush's locker and she'll forget about the Ground Bees. Same scenario here, they are beneficial predators and reportedly sting but I'd bet they don't.

Members will always

complain about bees, and let's face it, there are people out there who are deathly allergic. When nectar sources begin to dry up in late summer bees head for the trash cans. Some of these "litter caddies" and other containers are terrible. Try to collect trash more often in these places. In heavy trash areas like snack bars, try switching to an enclosed can with a lid. It really helps to have the kids bring the cans in and wash them out every couple of days. Whoever is scheduled to stay and check greens on weekends can easily do this; also, it gives them an excuse when the greens burn up: "I was doing the trash boss."



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