



Cicada Killer Wasp: Friend Or Foe?

By John Daniels, agronomist, Central Region | August 18, 2017



Burrowing from female cicada killer wasps can wreak havoc on putting greens.

Few insects elicit more fear on a golf course than a large, black and yellow cicada killer wasp buzzing by one's head. At roughly 1.5 inches long, cicada killer wasps present a formidable appearance. To the untrained eye, they are easily mistaken for hornets or yellow jackets. During July and August, cicada killer wasps are commonly observed flying around hunting for cicadas and digging burrows in sandy soils. Golf course bunkers are especially popular places for cicada killer wasps, which increases the potential for encounters with golfers and demands for eradication. But is control necessary?

Although they can be quite territorial, male cicada killer wasps lack a stinger and pose little threat to humans. They can be a nuisance though, with their aggressive dive-bombing tactics. In most instances, simply walking by and ignoring them is the best course of action.

Female cicada killer wasps, on the other hand, are much calmer and will typically avoid human contact. They do possess a stinger, but rarely use it on humans unless they are grabbed or stepped on. Golfers have little to worry about as long as they don't try to handle the wasps and wear closed-toed shoes. The primary purpose of the stinger is to paralyze cicadas, not to defend their nest. Female cicada killers are not typically aggressive toward someone looking for a golf ball or getting ready to play a golf shot.

Cicada killer wasps benefit golf courses by helping to keep cicada populations in check. This natural control is important for maintaining healthy trees, which cicadas can damage through feeding and egg laying. Plus, it helps to provide some reprieve for golfers from the relentless noise created by singing male cicadas.

Just because you have cicada killer wasps on your golf course doesn't mean you should control them. Educating golfers and staff about these insects should be the first step in addressing fears. Control measures are only advised if the burrowing negatively impacts playability, such as on a putting green. For such scenarios, spot treat the entrance to the burrow with an insecticide dust of cyfluthrin or another pyrethroid.

For those wanting to learn more about cicada killer wasps, read this University of Kentucky Department of Entomology [publication](#).

Central Region Agronomists:

Bob Vavrek, regional director - bvavrek@usga.org

John Daniels, agronomist - jdaniels@usga.org

Zach Nicoludis, agronomist - znicoludis@usga.org

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