

It's wasp week, prepare for the Big Sting

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YOU don't need a pest expert to tell you how a wasp can destroy the mood at your barbecue.

But they could help you with planning dates to avoid them.

According to a study, wasps are at their most annoying in British gardens during the last few days of July - so watch out this week.

Pest controllers deal with more nuisance nests in this period than in any other over the summer.

The warning comes from an insurance firm which handles 3,000 wasp and hornet claims a year. In the last week of July last year, wasp and hornet claims leapt by 98



per cent compared with the summer average. More than 200 claims were made in a single week - compared with the average of 106 for the whole summer. A similar pattern was found in 2007.

Wasps become more of a nuisance at the height of summer as their nests expand and the number of insects in each colony grows. And because it is the first full week of the

summer holidays for many schools, people are spending more of the day in their gardens - where they come across nests.

Jon Florsheim, of insurer HomeServe, said: 'The summer is nesting season for wasps and hornets which is why we all associate the hot weather with stings and swatting away annoying insects over an al fresco lunch.'

'It is not unusual for nests to be situated inside sheds or close to well-used entrances, in which case they can become particularly troublesome.'

Homeowners should not try to remove a wasp or hornet nest themselves. Hornet colonies reach their peak population in late summer and can contain 700 large, angry insects. Wasp nests are even larger - and can contain up to 10,000 insects. The crea-

tures can mobilise the entire nest to sting in defence of an attack.

Around three in 100 people suffer severe reactions to a wasp or hornet sting.

Killing a hornet near its nest can also be dangerous. The insects release a distress pheromone that could trigger an attack from the whole colony. Traces of the chemical left behind on clothes can provoke an angry reaction much later in the day.

Unlike honey bees which can only sting once, wasps and hornets can attack repeatedly, injecting their victims with venom. The most frequent wasps seen in gardens are the common wasp and the German wasp. Their nests are made from chewed wood pulp and saliva.

How to make insects buzz off
Good Health - Pages 38 & 43