

Stinging and Biting Pests- Landscapers Enemies

Working in the landscape can be very rewarding; it can bring you great financial rewards, joy, and a peace of mind. Very often landscapers are reminded that there are pests lurking in the landscapes and ready to defend themselves; they only defend themselves by biting or stinging when feeling threatened.

Some of the common stinging pests in our landscape are; fire ants, hornets, yellow jackets, cicada killer, velvet ants, scorpions, and centipedes. Common biting pests are chiggers (mite larva), spiders, and ticks. Let's not forget snakes, although most snakes are beneficial and are not harmful. Snakes are afraid of people just as equal as people are afraid of snakes. They prefer to feed on small creatures such as rats and mice. The important thing is that when working outdoors we should be aware of our surroundings. Also, remember the extreme case; if you are working close to any body of water, it is always better to believe that there are alligators and take the necessary precaution. Extra caution is necessary when the edge of the waterway is covered with vegetation; it could be a habitat for alligators.

It would be a mistake for me not to bring the invisible bug syndrome to your attention. The invisible bug syndrome is a delusional condition whereby individuals believe they are infested with an invisible and unknown skin parasite. The proper name for the invisible syndrome is Ekbom syndrome. The condition is very common and is not caused by pest in the landscape.

How to reduce the risk of being stung- Apply insect repellent over your body before going out in the field, especially in the spring and summer. To reduce a bee attack, wear light colored clothing when working in the landscape; it is easier to see pests crawling on light color clothing than dark color ones. It cannot be overemphasized that you should always be aware of your surroundings. Bees often form hives in trees and shrubs that are unknown to landscapers; if you get too close to the hives you will be attacked. Wasps and hornets often nest in trees and shrubs and will attack landscapers so be on the lookout. Avoid sticking your hands under rocks and mulch; they are habitats for spiders.

How to Treat Landscape for Pest- The first step in controlling any pest is to accurately identify the pest. Also, when considering pest control, suppressing the pest population should be your goal and not eradication. Avoid using broad spectrum pesticides that will kill most insects. It is important to note that although those pests pose harm to the landscapers in many cases insects are beneficial to the landscape itself. Finally, simply because you see a few pests it does not mean that there is a need to apply pesticides.

For more information on this topic and any other horticulture related topics, contact Grantly Ricketts, Commercial Horticulture Agent with UF/IFAS Extension in Osceola County at gricketts@ufl.edu or 321-697-3000.