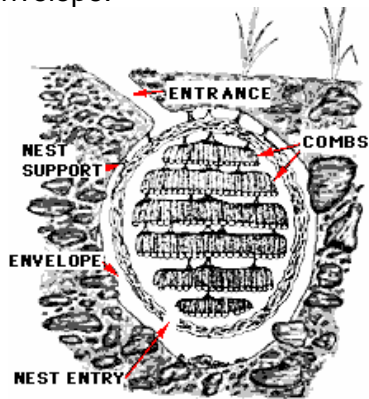


The Bee-Buster - Dave deCalesta Reprinted from 6/06 KLA Newsletter

When I was a kid, any bug that flew, was yellow and black striped, and stung with a vengeance we called a bee. This included bumblebees, hornets, honey bees, and yellow jackets. As lake-dwellers know, yellow jackets can be a real nuisance when eating outside as they swarm over food. For those of us with severe allergic reactions to bee stings, yellow jackets can be life-threatening.

Yellow jackets build underground nests, often using existing tunnels, such as mouse and chipmunk burrows, to construct their many-tiered paper nest combs which are surrounded by a thick paper envelope.



Typical Yellow-Jacket Nest

I found our first bee nest in typical fashion: I ran over the entrance with my lawn mower and was instantly attacked and stung multiple times. After a little research, I uncovered a number of options: 1) avoid the nest opening; 2) use yellow jacket traps; 3) spray with wasp killer; 4) drown the nest; 5) poison the nest.

Avoiding the nest was unacceptable, especially with young grandchildren about. **Spraying** with the wasp-killer aerosol is satisfying, but never gets enough of the underground bees or the queen because of the protective envelope around the nest. **Traps** and **drowning** don't work (personal experience). **Pesticides** might work, if you don't mind using them and can find and buy them without a permit.

With no acceptable solution, I experimented. What about gasoline? I took a long hose, and funneled about 3 gallons of gas down a bee hole, getting stung only 3 times in the process. But getting the gas to ignite was difficult. Throwing lit matches from 5 feet away didn't work. I had to creep up and drop a match directly down the

entrance. KA-WHOOM! After the smoke cleared, (and I got up off the ground, having been knocked flat) I discovered a 3x5 foot crater in my yard, that my eyebrows were singed off (thank goodness for eyeglasses), and that I was covered with mud, grass, and bee parts. **DON'T USE GAS!**

When the next bee nest appeared, I tried something different. I hooked up a weed-burner (long metal rod with a barrel on one end and valve on the other end – see figure below) to a gas-grill propane tank.



Weed-burner Propane Tank Rig

Creeping up to the bee hole after dark (when bees don't fly), I lit the gas at the barrel end of the weed burner. Turning the gas on all the way turned the weed burner into a miniature flame-thrower. I stuck the barrel right up to the entrance of the bee hole and let 'er rip for 5 minutes. The flame went directly down the hole. Because the nest was in an old mouse burrow, flames and smoke shot out of multiple entrances, including one between my feet! But the weed-burner did the job! I got all the bees, and the only evidence was a scorched area about a foot square on the lawn. However, give your neighbors advance warning if you try this: the loud whooshing noise, billowing smoke, and flickering flame-light could prompt them to call the fire department. Use only on in-ground nests, and away from buildings and gas lines.

The weed-burners are a little difficult to find, try farm supply houses. Expect to pay ~ \$75-\$100 for the weed-burner.