

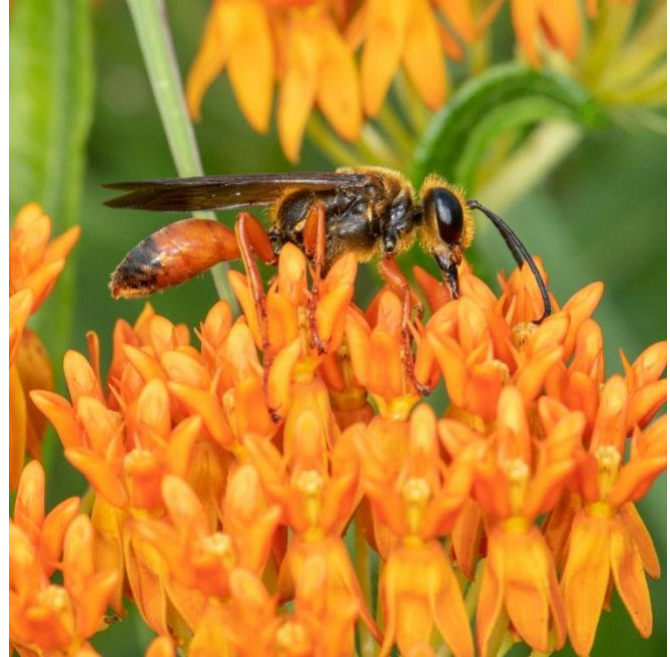
Wasps: Their Biology, Diversity and Role as Beneficial Insects and Pollinators of Native Plants by Heather Holm

Review by Elizabeth Craig

There are thousands of species of wasps in the United States and the vast majority are solitary, nonaggressive wasps. Yellowjackets and hornets, who have given wasps a bad name, make up a small proportion of all wasp species.

Heather Holm's new book provides us with a wealth of fascinating information about this misunderstood group of insects.

Wasps feed insects to their young and provide important pest control. By feeding many of the most damaging garden pests to their hungry developing larvae; predatory and parasitic wasps provide valuable natural pest control to the agricultural sector as well as your vegetable garden.



Great Golden Sand Digger Wasp. Photo by Heather Holm

Wasps and bees are close relatives and share the same habitat requirements. But bees have evolved to eat a vegetarian diet, utilizing pollen as the protein source for their growing larvae.

Wasps are generally carnivores during their larval phase, eating insects and small pieces of meat provided by their mother. A protein rich diet is needed to grow into an adult wasp. Wasps have smooth bodies and do not actively collect pollen: they are considered incidental pollinators, unlike bees that have charged pollen trapping hairs.

Wasps need flower-rich landscapes to hunt for insect prey to feed their young. Adult wasps both social and solitary only feed on sugars. In the wild, sugars come from flower nectar, rotting fruit and honeydew produced by aphids and scale insects.

Adult wasps require flowers with shallow nectaries and readily accessible nectar. These are generally flat top flowers that provide easy landing pads favored by butterflies, bees and beetles too. Compared to bees, wasps have short tongues and cannot reach into the deep nectaries of many flowers pollinated by bees.

Some of our most beautiful native perennials, like goldenrods, asters and mountain mints, will attract these beneficial solitary wasps to your garden.

For Heather Holm's wasp plant list for the northeast, click [HERE](#).

It's time to enjoy and appreciate the wasps in your garden, in addition to the butterflies and bees. Wasps are valuable friends, not enemies.