

Red Velvet Ant

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FIG. 1

Type Pest: chewing insect (*Dasymutilla occidentalis* Linnaeus)

- These insects resemble large ants but they are wasps (Order Hymenoptera, which contains bees, wasps, and ants)

Type Metamorphous: complete (egg, larva, pupa, adult stages)

Other Common Names

- Velvet ant, cow killer, and mule killer
- The name 'cow killer' was given to the velvet ant because of the reputation of the female's painful sting

Period of Primary Occurrence: late spring into summer

- Adults are most common in late spring and summer
- Majority of human encounters involve solitary red velvet ant females
- They can occasionally occur in large numbers on flowers of landscape plants and can be found crawling through lawns and digging in soil

Identifying Characteristics of Insect Pest

EGG STAGE

- Females seek the immature stages of ground-nesting bees and wasps, digging to the nesting chambers and eating a hole through the cocoon
- A female then deposits an egg on the host larva, and the egg soon hatches into a white legless grub

LARVAL & PUPAL STAGES

- Larvae are solitary, external parasitoids of developing bumble bees and certain other ground nesting bees and wasps
- Larvae are solitary, external parasites of white grubs (larval stage of a beetle) that infest lawns
- Larvae develop through several larval stages before forming a pupa



FIG. 2



FIG. 3



FIG. 4

ADULT STAGE

- Males and females are black overall with patches of dense orange-red hair on the thorax...the middle body segment, and abdomen...the hind body segment (Fig. 1-3)
- Females are wingless and brightly colored
- Males have dark, transparent wings and are capable fliers (Fig. 6)
- Females have extremely painful stings and should not be handled
- Males do not sting
- Females are frequently seen running around lawns, leaf litter and pastures on warm summer days. They search for bumble bee nests as well as nests of other wasps, bees and beetles, in which they lay their eggs (Fig. 4-5)
- Males are rarely seen
- Red velvet ants are the largest velvet-ant species (approximately ¾" in length)
- Adults feed on nectar and water



Pest Status

- Red velvet ants cause no damage to plants
- They are not aggressive and should be left alone / not disturbed
- Females will sting if handled; though extremely painful, their sting is rarely dangerous. People who are hypersensitive to bee and wasp stings may have very severe reactions and should avoid close encounters with red velvet ants

Best Management Practices (BMP)

- Velvet ants are rarely plentiful enough to become a nuisance; control generally not warranted
- If control is desired in a high use or high traffic area, individual velvet ants can be controlled with an aerosol spray for wasps and bees
- Red velvet ants can provide some control of certain ground-nesting wasps, solitary bees and some other insects such as beetles and flies

Related Resources

<http://entweb.clemson.edu/eiis/pdfs/mv1.pdf>

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Always remember to read and heed six of the most important words on the label: "KEEP OUT OF REACH OF CHILDREN"

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