

**St. Lucie County Cooperative Extension**  
**8400 Picos Road, Suite #101**  
**Fort Pierce, FL 34945**  
**Office: (772) 462-1660**  
**Fax (772) 462-1510**

## **FACT SHEET**

### **Africanized Honey Bees**

University of Florida

St. Lucie County Cooperative Extension

Contact: Ed Skvarch, Commercial Horticulture Agent

#### **Introduction**

Africanized honey bees (AHB) have made their way into the state of Florida. AHBs breed and compete with the European strains of honey bees that normally inhabit our state. Because Florida's AHB population is increasing, it is important to become familiar with AHBs and their behavior.

Although they are often referred to as killer bees, the correct term are Africanized honey bees.

- Another common mistake is describing them as aggressive.
- Their behavior is actually defensive--they react to human invasion of their environment and defend themselves when necessary.
- Attacks occur when people are too close to a nesting colony of AHBs.

These tips from the Florida IPM Office and St. Lucie County Extension can help you educate and protect yourself and your family.

#### **Avoiding AHBs & Protecting Yourself**

##### **Common AHB Nesting Sites**

Be aware of the places where AHBs are likely to nest. Potential sites include:

- empty containers
- places with holes
- lumber piles
- manholes
- water meters
- utility infrastructures
- old tires
- trees
- garages
- outbuildings
- sheds
- walls
- crawl spaces under houses or buildings

### **Bee-proof Your Property**

- **The best defense is a good offense.** Removing or blocking potential nesting sites around your yard and house reduces your risk of encountering Africanized honey bees at home.
- In order to 'bee-proof' a building, remove all potential nesting sites ([see the list above](#)).
- From **March - July** (swarming season), inspect your property weekly for unusual bee activity.
- **Seal all gaps larger than 1/8-inch** in walls and around chimneys and plumbing.
- **Install screens made of 1/8-inch** hardware cloth over other openings, such as rain spouts, vents, cavities of trees and fence posts, water meters, utility boxes, etc.

### **What To Do If You Get Stung**

- If you are stung by any type of bee, do not stay in one place and swat the bees. Remember, AHBs are trying to defend their nest. When a stinging event happens, you are too close to the nest, and you need to leave the area immediately. If you stand still, the bees may become more agitated. Cover your nose and mouth with your shirt as you run. This restricts bee access to your airways.
- Furthermore, do not hide in thick underbrush or water. It may take the bees 30 minutes or longer to leave an area! Finally, seek shelter in a building or vehicle. Some bees will probably enter the shelter with you, but not as many as will remain outside.
- If you witness an attack, do not go to the victim and try to help. It is better to stand at a safe distance and yell to the person to leave the area as quickly as possible.
- Anyone who has been stung should seek immediate medical attention or call 911 for assistance.  
(**Note:** Africanized honey bees will attack dark colors, going for eyes, nose, and mouth. Some estimates say that it will take about five stings per pound to kill a person; other estimates are higher.)

### **Don't Worry, 'Bee' Happy**

Africanized honey bees can be frightening. You should respect them, but remember that their "killer bee" image comes from rumors and sci-fi movies, not from facts.

You can find more information about AHBs at FDACS's [African Honey Bee](#) page.

For more information about integrated pest management (IPM), visit [IPM Florida](#).

Adapted from: [Africanized Honey Bees](#) by James D. Ellis, Jr. and Faith M. Oi. Published by: [Entomology and Nematology Department](#) (7/2006).

For more information contact Ed Skvarch at St. Lucie County Cooperative Extension at (772) 462-1660.

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