

Nature Niche

Nature By The Yard – Fostering a Natural Sense of Wonder

autumn, 2009

Volume 6, Issue 3
Calendar of Events
Please call the hosting organization for reservation information.

Tues. Dec. 8, 11-12 noon. **Toddler Walk.** Kids ages 18-36 months with adult. Plainsboro Township Parks and Recreation. (609) 799-0909 ext. 332 Fee

Wed. Dec. 9. 10-11am. **Toddler Walk.** Kids ages 18-36 months with adult. Buttinger Nature Center. Pennington, NJ (609) 737-7592. Fee.

Fri. Dec. 11 4:30-6pm. **Trim A Tree For Wildlife.** Families. Join us for a fun, informal program where we will make several treats for the animals in your backyard. Bowman's Hill Wildflower
(continued)

Yellow Jackets

My husband and I recently discovered yellow jackets going in and out of a crack between the chimney and siding of our house. This observation prompted much discussion and procrastination, but eventually we decided we needed to spray the nest before it got too large. The next morning, there were several dozen yellow jackets in my family room.

Apparently finding their primary exit blocked with toxic

spray, these half dead insects were crawling around my carpet via the fireplace. As I removed them (vacuum), I was able to get a really good look at these wasps and I have to say, they are beautiful in a creepy sort of way.

With yellow and black patterns on their body and head, yellow jackets display warning colors that some animals have to advertise they either taste bad

(Continued on back page)

Critter-proofing Your Home

With the article above on yellow jackets, I thought it might be a good idea to talk a little about critter-proofing your home, since I have first hand experience with an invasion. From squirrels in the attic to skunks and groundhogs under the wood pile or shed, animals seeking a winter refuge can wreak havoc on your home.

In the fall, some creatures migrate south for warmer temperatures and an abundant food supply, but many stay here to either hibernate or endure the cold winter months. It is those critters that need to find

refuge in sheltered areas, and what better place than the comforts of your home.

To a raccoon, your unused chimney is just as good a place, if not better, than a hollow tree. The shutters of your home are an ideal hibernating spot for a colony of bats, and a groundhog would love to excavate under your wood pile and sleep the winter away.

Personally, I'd be more than happy to let a colony of bats use my stationery shutters during the winter, but I definitely don't want a gray squirrel using the insulation in my attic for a

(Continued on back page)

(continued from page 1)

Preserve. Reservations
215.862.2924. Fee.

Sat. Jan. 23 4-6pm.
Creatures of the Night. Bring the family for a close look at some familiar animals that come out at night. Join us along with The Mercer Wildlife Center for a fun evening, meeting local wildlife, walking through the winter woods and sipping hot cider with cookies. Bowman's Hill Wildflower Preserve. 215.862.2924. Fee

Fri. Jan. 29 Time tba.
Nature Inside Out-Using fiction picture books as a springboard for nature discovery. Alliance for New Jersey Environmental Education Conference. Princeton. visit <http://anjee.net> for more information.

"To enjoy the outdoors, its best to be in it."

We're on the Web

<http://naturebytheyard.com>

Yellow Jackets (*continued*)

or have the ability to sting or bite.

Yellow jackets are social wasps, meaning they live with hundreds and sometimes thousands of siblings and usually one queen.

Their nest is primarily made of wood that is chewed into a pulp and spit out. It is rarely seen though because it is often underground or hidden between human made structures (such as walls).

Yellow jackets aren't typically aggressive (unless their nest is

threatened) until the fall when their diet changes from protein to sugar. It is only then that they become pests around trash cans, at picnics and other outdoor events.

Since they don't reuse their papery nests and only the queen survives the winter, maybe we didn't need to spray our colony. But with fall coming, I didn't want to risk finding deviant yellow jackets going out their "back door" on a joy ride before their impending doom.

Critter Proofing *continued*

winter home. You have to find your comfort level though.

There are several things you can do to prevent wildlife from using your home. Raise your wood pile 4-6 inches above the ground to discourage animals from digging underneath. Trim tree limbs that overhang your roof to avoid easy access to your attic and chimney. Install a chimney cap to block raccoons, opossums, birds and squirrels' entry. Dryer and attic vents offer easy access, so make sure

there is heavy duty hardware cloth secured to the inside of the attic or laundry room vent. Trim over grown bushes and clear debris from around your foundation. These offer shelter and invite wildlife in. Note to self: Seal cracks in the mortar.

Taking a few steps now will save you huge headaches later.

Remember, it is much easier to discourage wildlife from moving in with you, than it is to evict them once they are settled in.

About Our Organization...

Nature By The Yard was started in January, 2001. We offer fun, hands-on nature education programs for schools, scouts, camps, libraries, birthday parties, garden clubs, nature centers, wildflower preserves and other organized groups. We also provide

workshops for teachers on using the schoolyard as a classroom tool as well as offer advice and expertise on designing school yard habitats. For details on our services, visit <http://naturebytheyard.com> or call Pam at (609) 610-6292.