



## Bee on The Lookout!

The Africanized honey bee, popularly known as the "killer bee," has moved into the south-central Texas and the southern United States. It has been in Austin County since 1994. This insect, which has been migrating from South American since the 1950's, looks just like a domestic honey bee, but it is not nearly as good natured. In fact, it has a bit of a quick temper.

The domestic bee has lived in harmony with human beings for hundreds of years. It has been bred for gentleness and good honey production. By contrast, the Africanized bee is a "wild" bee that is not comfortable being around people or animals. Any colony of bees will defend its hive, but Africanized bees do so with gusto. These bees are more likely to sense a threat at greater distances, become more upset with less reason, and sting in much greater numbers.

The Africanized bee's "killer" reputation is greatly exaggerated, but it does have some basis in fact. In isolated instances, people and animals have been stung to death. Most often, the person who died was not able to get away from the bees quickly. Animal losses have occurred for the same reasons. Pets and livestock were tied up or penned when they encountered the bees. However, Africanized bees do not roam in giant swarms looking for victims to attack. Like most animals, these bees react defensively only when they feel threatened.

Your best protection against the Africanized bee is to understand how it behaves and react accordingly. Bees "swarm" to establish new hives in the spring and fall. Bees are most active then. You may find bees setting up housekeeping where you live literally overnight. Individual bees gathering pollen on flowers or masses of bees clinging together in swarms generally will not bother you. However, bees are more likely to be defensive after they have established a colony and started raising young.

What should I do about the Africanized Bee? Here are some commonsense precautions to protect your family and home.

1. Make a "bee patrol" around your home once or twice a week during swarming season. Listen for the sound of bees in the air. Persistent buzzing may mean a hive or swarm is nearby.
2. "Bee-proof" your home by filling in potential nesting sites such as tree cavities and holes in outside walls. Put screens on the tops of rain spouts and over water meter boxes in the ground. Remove piles of trash and junk.
3. If attacked by Africanized honey bees, your best defense is to run away as fast as you can. Seek shelter immediately in a building, a car or heavy brush.
4. If you are stung many times, seek medical attention immediately.
5. If you are allergic to bee stings, or think you might be, consult your physician immediately for the best precautions to take.

It is important to note that strings from Africanized bees are no more venomous than those of the European bees. For more information on Africanized bees, contact the Texas Cooperative Extension Office of Austin County at (979)865-2072 or visit us on our website at <http://austin.agrilife.org>