

Hover flies

(Diptera: Syrphidae)

Hover flies, often referred to as flower flies or drone flies, are beneficial insects that appear in large numbers during the spring and summer. They are often mistaken for bees or wasps and can cause undue fear over potential stings. Fortunately, they do not possess stingers. Hover flies can be readily distinguished from wasps and bees by their single pair of wings.



Figure 1: Hover fly on a finger to illustrate size.
Image credit Timothy Gibb, Purdue Agriculture [5].

Identification

Hover flies belong to the order Diptera and the family Syrphidae. As can be seen in Figures 1, 2 & 3 hover flies, like all true flies, have only one pair of wings. In comparison, bees and wasps have two pairs of wings. Hover flies also have a typical fly head with short antennae and bulbous eyes (Figures 1 & 3). Adult hover flies are 4-10 mm long and have dark flattened bodies with black and yellow markings.

During flight, many hover flies move in a characteristic way. As their name suggests, they hover over objects but will also dart to and fro.

The immature hover fly looks like a maggot and can grow up to 10 mm long. The larvae hunts by touch. They have mouth hooks which grip and pierce the skin of their prey prior to extracting their body contents (Figure 4).

Management

Management is usually not necessary as hover flies are beneficial insects. They are considered the second most important pollinator next to bees (Figure 2). Further, some species of hover flies can control garden pests such as soft-bodied aphids and scale insects.



Figure 2: Hover fly collecting pollen.
Image credit Steve Schoof, North Carolina State University [7].



Figure 3: Hover fly on a rose leaf.

Image credit Ashley Walsh, ABC Adelaide [1].



Figure 4: Hover fly larva feeding on an aphid.

Image credit David Cappaert, Bugwood.org [6].

Further information

For further information phone **136 186** or email plant.protection@ecodev.vic.gov.au.

References

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