

Controlling wasps without insecticides

While the wasp populations in most vineyards were lower than last year, some of the very early, thin-skinned varieties still suffered some damage.

The culprits belong to the family of *vespidae*, with the European paper wasp appearing in the largest numbers, followed by the yellow jackets and the bald faced hornets. While the yellow jacket and the bald faced hornet are very aggressive and will sting with little provocation, the European paper wasp will only sting in self-defence.

There are a number of conventional and more innovative approaches to wasp control in the vineyard, from application of insecticides (none are, to my knowledge specifically registered for the control of wasps on grapes), to trapping with beer, pop or sugar water to vacuuming with small, hand held car vacuums.

Recently, trapping has become much more viable and effective, thanks to the commercialization of a very effective wasp attractant. The active ingredient is n-heptyl butyrate, which is available in a number of different forms. One is as an ingredient in a disposable wasp trap, which is unfortunately still quite expensive (approx. \$10.00).

Another is an attractant lure, distributed by Phero Tech. The lure can be fitted to most existing wasp traps, although the manufacturer also sells an (overpriced) trap. A third attractant comes as a liquid in small plastic vials. This is meant as a refill for a specific trap, but can be used with small modifications in any existing trap. Unfortunately, this form of the attractant is only available in the US to date.

In my own experience the disposable trap and the liquid attractant are equally effective for between two to three weeks in summer weather. The lure from Phero Tech seemed a little less attractive to wasps, but still caught more than three to four times as many wasps as the same trap with sugar water. The lure may be effective for a little longer than the other two attractants.

My personal favourite is the liquid attractant, because you can use and reuse pretty much any old wasp trap. Just glue a small piece of cotton wool to the inside of the trap and soak it with some of the attractant. Fill the bottom third or half of the trap with soapy water, to ensure that the wasps drown quickly. This material is so effective that you need to be very careful not to spill any on your hands or clothing. One drop spilled on the roof of my truck drew between thirty and forty wasps within one minute!

While trapping in summer can result in large numbers of dead wasps, trapping in springtime may be more effective overall, before they multiply into large populations. Wasps are considered to be beneficial insects. They feed on a variety of other insects and can play a role in the reduction of caterpillar populations; but their impact on pest insect populations in the vineyard is probably negligible.

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