

# Landscapers versus Texas Critters FactSheet

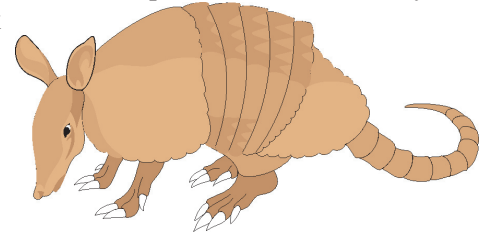
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Landscape workers face many hazards in Texas. In addition to problems caused by sun, heat, cold, lawn equipment, and poison ivy, oak and sumac, they may also encounter insects, reptiles, and animals during their daily work. Some of these creatures are just nuisances, but others can be deadly. Landscape workers should practice safety when working at any location.

## Insects

- Wasps frequently build nests in ornamental shrubbery. Before trimming any shrubbery workers should carefully examine each bush. Workers who trim shrubbery should be equipped with long-range wasp spray and wear long-sleeved shirts and neckerchiefs.
- Honeybees gathering nectar may be seen by landscapers working around flowering plants. These bees are usually not aggressive if left alone. Bees clinging together in swarms usually will not bother humans. There are very few colonies of European honeybees living in the wild in Texas. Most of them have been killed by disease and parasites. If you see a swarm of bees they are not likely to be European honeybees.
- Africanized bees live in Texas and are dangerous. Africanized bees may swarm as many as twelve times per year in warm weather. Once they have set up a hive, they become very aggressive. The noise and exhaust from mowers and trimmers can disturb a hive and hundreds of bees will attack. Check an area carefully for hives before starting any motorized equipment. Don't allow grass clippings to be ejected into suspect areas. Africanized bees can build hives in almost any structure so be aware that buildings, culverts or drainage pipes, as well as old trees may harbor a colony. When Africanized bees attack, hide in a nearby place like a building or a vehicle, since they can chase a human up to a mile and can sting through clothing. If many Africanized bees sting a human at one time, it can cause death. When a bee stings, it will leave the stinger in the victim's skin. A stinger can be removed by raking fingernails across it. Don't pinch or pull the stinger out. Put ice on a sting to reduce the swelling. If stung by many bees at once, seek medical help immediately.
- Bumble Bees make colonies in the ground and can be disturbed by mowing or brush-clearing operations. Just like any other bees, they will attack if the hive is disturbed. However, bumblebees can sting multiple

times. If you are attacked, place both hands over your face and walk away since they will attack anything moving suddenly. Try to get into a vehicle or building.



- Yellow Jackets are wasps that also nest underground, in hollow trees and structures. They behave much like bumble bees and can also sting multiple times. If they attack, use the same method to get away.
- Hornets are large wasps that prey on bees and yellow jackets. They build large, football-shaped paper nests in trees, in shrubbery, on gables, or in tree hollows. Avoid these nests because these insects also sting humans.
- Fire Ants are found in all parts of Texas. Their nests are usually high mounds of loose soil. These can be up to 18 inches (45 centimeters) tall in pastures, but are not usually more than four inches (10 centimeters) on frequently mown lawns. Never run over these mounds with a mower. This could throw hundreds of angry ants onto a worker or their co-workers. If stung by fire ants and there is no allergic reaction to the insect stings, apply ice packs in cycles of 10 minutes on, 10 minutes off of the skin. The stings will most probably develop pustules (tiny blisters) by the next day. Take care that these don't become infected until they have disappeared in 3 to 8 days. If a victim is allergic to ant stings, seek medical care immediately.
- Mosquitoes are most active at dawn and dusk. Outdoor workers should wear insect repellent with DEET to protect against mosquitoes that may be carrying diseases such as West Nile Virus or Dengue Fever.
- Ticks carry several diseases. Therefore landscape workers should check their body for ticks at the end of each workday. If a tick is found attached to the skin, grasp it near the head with some fine-tipped tweezers and slowly pull it out. Do not squeeze its body when doing this. If you get severe headaches and joint pain within a week of being bitten by a tick, see a doctor immediately. Some diseases, carried by ticks, like Rocky Mountain spotted fever, can be fatal if not treated.

## Reptiles

- Snakes are found all over Texas and there are several kinds of poisonous snakes. Since it is not easy to tell which ones are poisonous, avoid all of them. Because snakes are cold-blooded, they like to live in a warm environment. In hot months, they like to get into shade and can be found under bushes, trees, logs and rocks. In cooler months, they like to get out in sunshine and can be seen on roads, sidewalks or lawns. Most snakes are not aggressive. If they hear humans coming they will crawl away. If surprised, a snake will try to bite. In order to keep from surprising a snake, do not move rocks or logs with hands. Use a stick or tool. Don't reach into places that cannot be seen into. Don't step over logs or stones, step on top of them first and look on the other side. One snake that may not crawl away is the cottonmouth. They will strongly defend their territory. Cottonmouths are found near water, so be careful if working around ponds, lakes, bayous, and riverbanks. If bitten by a snake, seek medical help immediately.
- Alligators can be found in streams or bayous in the low-lying coastal areas of Texas. Before starting work, check for alligators in nearby water.

## Animals

- Wild animals can be found even in large cities. Some of the most common animals seen early in the morning or in the evening are skunks, raccoons, opossums, foxes, coyotes, squirrels, and bats. Just like snakes, they will usually try to run away. If a skunk comes close and points its tail at a human, they should run! If these animals do not try to run or if they are acting strangely, they may have rabies. Avoid them by leaving the area or getting into a building or vehicle. Call the local animal control organization and report the animal. If an animal attacks, get the victim medical help immediately and call animal control. If animal control can capture the animal, it can be tested for rabies. If it does not have rabies, the victim will not have to receive the series of rabies prevention injections. If the animal cannot be found the victim will have to have the rabies prevention injections as a precaution. Never touch a sick or dead bat, because they may have rabies.

- Pets should be considered when providing landscape care for homes. Ask if the homeowner has any animals that might be aggressive. If so, request that the animals be penned before workers arrive. Dogs and cats can also contract rabies, so follow the same instructions for wild animals if these pets are acting unusually or if they attack.

The Texas Department of Insurance, Division of Workers' Compensation has the following publications to assist employers and landscape workers in preventing injuries and illness. Visit employers at <http://www.tdi.state.tx.us/wc/safety/employers.html>

Categories under "Free Safety and Health Publications: Online Safety and Health Library."

- Cold Weather Fact Sheet
- Dengue Fever Fact Sheet
- Footwear Safety Fact Sheet
- Frostbite Fact Sheet
- Hypothermia Fact Sheet
- Insect Bites and Stings Fact Sheet
- Poison Ivy, Oak and Sumac Fact Sheet
- Lawn Equipment Safety Take 5
- Pesticide Poisoning Safety Education & Training Program
- Heat Stress Safety Education & Training Program
- Lightning Safety Education & Training Program

This publication was prepared with information from Texas A & M University Department of Entomology; Texas Parks and Wildlife Department; Texas Department of Health; and Texas Department of Insurance, Division of Workers' Compensation.

The Texas Department of Insurance,  
Division of Workers' Compensation (TDI, DWC)  
E-mail [resourcecenter@tdi.state.tx.us](mailto:resourcecenter@tdi.state.tx.us)  
or call 1-800-687-7080 for more information.

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