



photo by Bill Johnson

Have Figs, Need Wasps

The yellow jacket at your picnic intent on tasting your ham sandwich probably doesn't conjur up the image of a pollinator. Most wasps are carnivores, distant kin of their vegan bee relatives. You will find them in the garden, but they are diligently searching for prey. Caterpillars, beetles, grasshoppers, and flies are just some of the tasty treats they paralyze and carry off to provision their nests. Even smaller wasps, the parasitoids, are beneficial in the garden and allies of the gardener, but they aren't pollinators.

Pollinating wasps are in the minority but they do occur. One group of flower-visiting wasps, the masarids, provision their nests with pollen and nectar, just like bees. The champion wasp pollinators are the fig wasps of tropical and subtropical forests. Figs are vital foods for many birds, mammals, reptiles, and even fish. Next time you grab a fig newton, think: fig wasps, darn tootin!

