



Sap Beetles

As the weather fluctuates between summer days and fall nights, there is still a lot going on in the vegetable garden. Peppers both hot and sweet are still going strong, and squashes and potatoes are in their prime harvest time. Tomatoes however, are starting to slow down as the low evening temperatures slow the ripening process. There is one thing though that might not be slowing down – the population of sap beetles.

You may be familiar with these little rascals, as they are very common in the United States, and can be seen feeding on a variety of crops. They are most likely to be seen on tomatoes, corn, raspberries, and strawberries. They are referred to as sap beetles, or picnic beetles or picnic bugs.

The beetles are attracted to ripe to overripe fruit, and often those that have been wounded in some way. They rarely attack under ripe or developing fruits, but will if nothing else is available. A ripe tomato that has cracked would be a perfect target for these insects and they will infest and feed upon the fruit until it is destroyed completely. A cracked tomato with no insect damage could easily be salvaged.

Sap beetles are hard to control once you have them in your garden. The best action to take is to harvest fruits and vegetables regularly as they ripen. If you're done with your vegetable garden, it's best to keep harvesting, or pull the plants out, because these beetles, other insects and some disease will overwinter in plant debris.

Chemical treatment is generally not recommended because the sap beetles aren't generally an issue until the fruit/vegetable is ready for human consumption. Most chemicals have a harvest interval where so many days must pass before it's safe to harvest fruits and vegetables after a chemical application has been made.

Some research with traps has been successful, and is continuing to be looked at for further control options. A container located 5-10 feet from your garden with something like stale beer, or old juice, will attract the beetles, and deter them from your garden. Any sort of container will do – the beetles will be attracted to it, and when trying to feed, fall into the liquid and drown. If you utilize a trap, you have to check it almost daily to empty the container of beetles, and to replenish the beer or juice.



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