

Beetles Bugging Us

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There are a number of beetles bugging us during summer. Some can be harmful but the majority are not. Currently on the bugging us list, based on inquiries to Nebraska Extension, are Japanese beetles, green June beetles, blister beetles and strawberry root weevils (indoors).

In most cases, adult beetles are not damaging pests. If the insect is a pest at all, it is the larval stage that damages plants and not the beetle. Many beetles are beneficial. Japanese beetles are an exception. They can be voracious feeders and not picky about what they eat.

They are one-half inch long, metallic green and bronze, with 5 tufts of white hairs on each side of their body. Adults feed on over 300 plant types with linden, birch, rose, and grapes being favorite foods.

The majority of Japanese beetles have emerged from soil, where they overwintered as grubs, and will hang around into August. Beetles scrape green tissue off foliage, leaving behind a brown skeleton of leaf veins.

While damage can appear devastating, it rarely kills healthy, established trees. By the time defoliation occurs, most trees have produced enough stored food and developed leaf buds for next year. Control is difficult on large trees and rarely recommended.

On annual plants like tomatoes or beans, severe damage can kill plants. For smaller plants, hand pick Japanese beetles or knock them off into soapy water. This works well, especially if done each evening.

Organic insecticides that reduce beetle numbers are neem oil or pyrethrin. Synthetic insecticides like permethrin or cyfluthrin help. Read and follow label directions, especially for the waiting period between application and harvesting edible plants.

The larval grub of Japanese beetles can damage lawns in August if populations are high. Just because a site has large beetle numbers does not mean there will be high grub numbers. Monitor lawns for signs of browning, then pull back sod to check for grubs. If 10 or more per square foot are found, the insecticide Trichlorfon can be used at this stage. Know that killing grubs will not reduce beetle damage.

Green June beetles are three-fourths inch long, dull green beetles with irregular bronze stripes. They emerge from soil and sound like bumble bees. Adults feed on corn ears, ripened fruit, and tree sap. While concerning to homeowners due to their size and damage to fruit, populations are rarely large enough to warrant control. Prompt harvest of ripe fruit is the best management practice.

Green June beetle larvae is another white grub. It is large and has the odd characteristic of crawling on its back. While it will feed on turfgrass roots, numbers are rarely large enough to warrant control.

Blister beetles are beneficial insects who sometimes damage plants like potatoes and other vegetables. They are light gray, about one-half inch long, and longer than wide. The larvae feed on grasshopper eggs. When found in gardens, hand-pick beetles wearing gloves to prevent blisters caused by the chemical they emit. If needed, the organic Spinosad or synthetics cyfluthrin or permethrin can be applied.

Strawberry root weevils are harmless. They become a nuisance when invading homes during summer, sometimes in large numbers. The adult is one-fourth inch long, dark in color, and has a snout. Larvae feed on small roots of strawberries, brambles, and some ornamental plants but damage is minimal.

Adults are wingless and enter homes through loose fitting doors, windows, screens, and other openings. They crawl everywhere in the home but don't bite, eat stored food, damage structures, infest pets, or transmit diseases. The best response is to vacuum or sweep up the weevils and caulk the outside of the house to prevent entry. Make sure doors and windows are tight fitting.