

Japanese Beetles Emerging

By: Kelly Feehan, Extension Educator

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Japanese beetles are newer insects causing defoliation of many plant types. In the last few years, Colfax, Platte and area counties have seen an increase in damage. Mid-June through July is when adults emerge and begin feeding on plants.

Japanese beetles are fairly large green and brown beetles with white hairs that look like rows of white spots near each wing. They are the adult of a white grub that can damage lawns if there are 10 or more grubs per square foot. This is one of the few insects where larval and adult stages cause plant damage.

White grubs feed on roots and adult beetles feed mostly on leaves starting near the top of plants. They feed on a variety of plants with linden trees, grapes, and roses being favorites. Beetles feed for about 45 days scraping green tissue off foliage which leaves behind a skeleton of brown veins.

While leaf feeding appears harmful and is stressful, few established plants are killed by Japanese beetles except small annuals. When feasible, hand pick or knock beetles into a bucket of soapy water around 7 PM. This prevents plants producing a distress pheromone that attracts more beetles.

Labeled insecticides can be applied to smaller plants to reduce damage. In the case of large trees, it is not very effective as full coverage is difficult to attain. There is also a high risk to beneficial insects and song birds.

Linden trees cannot be treated with Imidacloprid or other Neonicotinoid insecticides. These include Acetamiprid, Clothianidin, Dinotefuran, Nitepyram, Thiacloprid, and Thiamethoxam. And never apply any insecticide to blooming plants.

Japanese beetle traps work very well which is why we do not recommend them. They appear to kill a lot of beetles, but each trap has the potential to attract a few extra 100,000 or more beetles to your yard. Traps are not a good management tool.

Killing grubs will not prevent or stop beetles from flying into a landscape. Adults can fly between 2 to 5 miles. Grub management only protects lawns.

When needed, grub insecticides are best applied at the end of June. Acelepryn (chlorantraniliprole) is a newer option that is becoming the product of choice. Others include imidacloprid and halofenozide. These products are recommended on lawns that had unacceptable grub damage the previous season.

With grubs, there is a damage threshold and finding a few grubs in a lawn is not cause for concern or the use of an insecticide. For the common annual white grub, whose adult is the masked chafer beetle, the threshold is 8 grubs per square foot. For Japanese beetle larvae, the threshold is 10 grubs per square foot.

With adults emerging and mating now, egg hatch will occur from early July into August. If a lawn did not have damage last year and a grub control product was not applied in June, keep an eye on the lawn for signs of brown spots or bird feeding. If 10 grubs can be found per square foot in late July or August, there are still insecticides that can be used at that time.

If the grub population is less than the damage threshold, established turfgrass can handle root feeding. Turf will regrow roots to replace roots lost due to grub feeding. As long as the turf is not mowed too short and watering is done correctly. Heavily irrigated lawns create favorable habitats for the beetle larvae so avoid overwatering.