Insects in the Landscape
By: Kelly Feehan, Extension Educator
Release: Week of July 12, 2021

Insects are abundant in landscapes if it is a healthy and diverse ecosystem. Most are harmless, even if they are munching plant leaves. Many are beneficial as prey of harmful insects, pollinators, or food for songbirds. Here are a few insects I've been asked about lately.

Green June beetles are large, three-fourths inch green beetles with orange markings on their wing edges. They fly during the day, unlike common June beetles that fly at night, and they make a noise similar to bumble bees. Their underside is metallic green or gold.

Green June beetles males will mass together on the ground or on plants. This creates concern and may lead to unnecessary pesticide applications. The beetles will feed on ripe or overripe fruits and vegetables so prompt harvesting may be all that is needed.

Adults are mating and laying eggs in turfgrass and will continue into July. The larvae is a white grub that has the odd habit of crawling on its back. If you have numerous green June beetles, monitor lawns in after egg hatch starting in August. If 8 or more grubs are found per square feet, an application of Dylox or Sevin may be justified.

Green June beetles may be confused for Japanese beetles who are also present from late June into July. These insects do not look alike. Japanese beetles are one-third to one-half inch long with a metallic green head and thorax and copper-brown wing covers. Five patches of white hairs look like dots on each side of their abdomen. The larvae is also a white grub that feeds on turfgrass.

Adult Japanese beetles feed on the leaves of many types of plants, especially lindens, grapes and roses. While I've had very few calls about Japanese beetles from Platte County or farther north, I've had calls from Hamilton County about numerous beetles damaging plants.

If control is needed, organic options are handpicking or knocking them into a bucket of soapy water. Roses can be protected with fine mesh netting. Neem and Pyola are two organic sprays that can protect plants for 3 to 7 days. Synthetic insecticides containing pyrethrin, bifenthrin or carbaryl (Sevin) may provide two weeks of protection.

As some of these insecticides affect pollinators, spray in the evening and after plants finish blooming. Be sure to follow label instructions to avoid harming pollinators. And do not use Japanese beetle traps in your yard; unless you wish to invite many more beetles to munch on your plants.

Tobacco budworm chew holes in flower buds or petals, especially on Geraniums and petunias. Infested flower buds often fail to open. Those that open have holey petals. The larva feeds for about a month; then drops to the soil to pupate. There are two generations per year, with the second causing the most harm. The small striped caterpillars vary in color and the adult is a moth.

Budworm control is difficult. There is no control once caterpillars are inside the bud. Monitor plants and handpick in the evenings. Insecticides with permethrin, bifenthrin or spinosad might reduce numbers. The best way to manage budworm is to stop growing what they commonly attack and grow different annuals.

Cicada killer wasps are very large yellow and black wasps seen hovering over turf and creating small mounds of soil in turf. Their size make them scary but they are gentle giants and only the female stings, which she will only do if handled.

Cicada killers are solitary wasps so there is only one insect per nest. They are communal and there can be more than one in an area. Females sting cicadas, then drag them to an underground nest to lay an egg on. After hatching, the larvae feeds on the cicada. Because they are not aggressive and cause no damage, management is not needed but to avoid handling or stepping on them.