



July 12, 2013

CONTROLLING SQUASH BUGS IS A CHALLENGE

Squash bugs are a common pest of members of the cucurbit family, with preference for winter squash and pumpkins. Next in line for damage are gourds, summer squash and melons, and occasionally cucumbers. Among squash, winter varieties such as hubbards and marrows, are the most severely effected. The squash bugs are very difficult to kill and can kill entire plantings if not controlled.

Now is a good time to scout your vegetable garden for adults, nymphs and eggs, and take steps to control them. Both adults and nymphs feed on plant leaves and stems by sucking sap from the plant tissues. While feeding, they inject a toxic substance into the plant, which causes yellowing of the leaf foliage and eventually wilting and death of the plant.

Adult squash bugs are 5/8 inches long and approximately 1/3 inch wide. The adults are winged, brownish black insects, sometimes mottled with gray or light brown on the back, and have a flat back. They have an unpleasant odor when crushed.

Scouting plants for adult insects and egg masses is important. One egg mass per plant indicates control measures are needed. Begin control as soon as insects are found, and prevent large populations from developing.

Adults overwinter in leaf litter and debris, emerging in the spring as the cucurbit vines begins to grow. After mating, females lay clusters of brick-red eggs in the angles between leaf veins on the underside of the leaves. Hatching occurs in 7-14 days. Begin control as soon as insects are found, and prevent large populations from developing.

Squash bug adults and nymphs hide on the undersides of leaves, near the crown of the plant, under clods of dirt or any other protective cover. They feed in groups and quickly move away when disturbed.

Use a multiple approach to control squash bugs. Take care of garden debris in the fall to eliminate insect overwintering sites. Mow vegetation around the garden or planting field to minimize insect habitat. Plant varieties of squash and pumpkin that have resistance, including Butternut, Royal Acorn and Sweet Cheese.

Home gardeners can handpick adults and crush egg masses to reduce insect numbers in the garden which is easier said than done. To help, place boards under plants, to provide aggregation sites for the insects. This can simplify collecting and destroying of the insects.

Adults are difficult to kill with insecticides, so control should be targeted at the nymphs to prevent them from surviving. Homeowners can spray plants with an insecticide, such as Sevin (carbaryl) or Eight (permethrin), being sure to target the undersides of leaves. Reapply the insecticide as directed on the label and follow harvest restrictions.



SEE YOU AT THE FAIR!

The Saline County Fair has a full lineup of events and activities this year. In this fast paced world you won't regret slowing down a little and taking part in the Fair. The County Fair is a lot of things, but from my aspect, it is youth proudly bringing in their static and live exhibits to be judged. It's the smiles that go with a good ribbon, but it's also the tears that sometimes just can't be held back when things don't go right. It's all about learning and growing. For a 2013 Fair schedule go to: <http://www.salinecountyfair.org/>

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