

Bad Bug: Cucumber Beetle

Description

Both common species of cucumber beetle, striped and spotted, measure about 1/4" long. Striped beetles are yellow with three wide black stripes. Spotted beetles are greenish-yellow with 11 black spots. All species over-winter as adults in garden debris or weedy areas.

Life Cycle

The beetles emerge in late spring to mate. Eggs of both species are pale orange-yellow and are laid in groups near the bases of cucurbit plants in the soil. The eggs hatch in about 10 days. The larvae work their way to the plant roots where they feed for the next 2 to 6 weeks. The mature larvae pupate in the soil. The adults emerge in 7 to 10 days and are not usually seen the rest of the summer except when feeding in cucurbit flowers. There is usually one generation a year.

Plants They Attack

Primary host plants are all members of the cucurbit family, including: cucumbers, melons, pumpkins, and squash. They also enjoy: beans, corn, beets, potatoes, tomatoes, asparagus, flowers, apricots and other soft fruits.

Spot the Damage

Adult cucumber beetles chew ragged holes in plant leaves, can consume entire blossoms and also feed on germinating seeds and newly planted seedlings. They are less of a problem on older healthy plants. The larvae attack the roots, sometimes causing severe damage. Cucumber beetles are the transmitters of deadly bacterial wilt and cucumber mosaic virus, so controlling the beetles is the key to preventing the spread of these pathogens. Start watching for them in late May.

Preventative Actions

Choose cucurbit varieties known to be resistant to bacterial wilt and cucumber mosaic virus.

Cover seedlings with a floating row cover to prevent beetles from landing. Remove covers or hand-pollinate cucurbits when necessary.

Scout your plants at least twice a week for beetles and larvae, checking the undersides of the leaves and the soil surface at the base of the plant.

Mulch newly planted seedlings with a loose material, like straw, as soon as they are planted- creating a barrier to females needing to come in contact with the soil to lay their eggs.

Hand squish insects, or pick them off and place them in a container of soapy water.

Disturb the soil around the base of plants by lightly scratching the surface. This will disrupt the beetles laying eggs in the soil. Squish the beetles and look for larvae. Be gentle so as not to disrupt the plant roots.

Attract native predators, soldier beetles, with marigolds and goldenrod. Soldier beetle larvae feed on the eggs and larvae of beetles, grasshoppers, moths and other insects.

Interplant susceptible crops with fragrant tansy, catnip or marigolds, said to deter adult beetles.

Organic Product Controls

Use neem oil or pyrethrins. (caution: pyrethrins are a broad-spectrum insecticide and will kill all insects).



Spotted and Striped Cucumber Beetle.
(Immature beetle in center.)



The larvae of both common cucumber beetles have three short legs and can grow to about 3/8 inch long.



Adult cucumber beetles chew ragged holes in plant leaves

Beneficial Predator Insects:

Common Soldier Beetle
(top)

Spiny Soldier Beetle
(bottom)

Adults and larvae of soldier beetles (also called leather wings) feed on insect eggs and larvae including those of cucumber beetles.

Watch out for this predator and leave them to do their good work!

