

Japanese Beetles

Japanese beetles are small, metallic green insects with copper wings that feed on over 300 different species of plants. These beetles feed on leaves, flowers and fruit leaving very few safe crops. Reports have already come in with Japanese beetle sightings and likely, by the time this is published, we will be near our peak for the season.

The first step in Japanese beetle control is to make sure you have correctly identified the insect. Many beetles, including the green June beetle, look similar enough to confuse some homeowners. Unlike some garden pests, Japanese beetles aren't masters of disguise. They come into your garden in large numbers and they remain on the leaves of your plants throughout the day. If you notice holes in your plant, examine it closer. If you see the beetles, they are likely responsible for the damage.

The best part about Japanese beetles, if there is one, is their short life cycle. They only live about 30-45 days. Although their swarms can seem devastating to your plants, their feeding will only temporarily stress trees and may be tolerable to many shrubs. Although trees may re-leaf out after the beetles die, smaller plants may not, and other treatment should be considered. As Japanese beetles feed, they release a volatile that attracts more beetles so if you only have a few beetles, control them early to prevent more from coming to your landscape.

For the organic gardener, a soapy bucket of water can provide control. Early in the morning, the beetles are slow and sluggish. If you can reach the branches that the beetles are resting on, shake them into the bucket. Soapy water will kill the beetles. Although this method doesn't work for most insects, the beetle's response to disturbance is to fall to the ground or in this case into the bucket rather than fly away. Another organic method is to cover individual plants with netting during peak beetle feeding.

Insecticides can be used but will need to be reapplied. Products that contain pyrethroid provide 2-3 weeks of protection while products that contain carbaryl will only last 1-2 weeks. These products are harmful to pollinators so applications should be done in the evening when bees are less active. All label directions should be followed. Neem products and Pyola will provide deterrence for 3-4 days.

One control method to *avoid* are Japanese beetle traps, as they tend to attract more beetles to your yard than they contain.

Although individual Japanese beetles only live for 30 days, the beetle population may plague our gardens for 4-6 weeks. A good pest management plan starts with regularly checking your plants and properly identifying issues. If you need assistance identifying insects, call or email our Virtual Response Line; 785-232-0062 ext. 104, arielw@kus.edu.