

Japanese Beetles

Japanese beetles are small, 7/16" long, metallic green with copper wings. Japanese beetles feed on over 300 different species of plants, making it challenging for homeowners to protect single plants in their yard from their feeding. These beetles feed on leaves, flowers and damaged fruit. In 2017, our Extension Master Gardener Response Line received dozens of calls about shiny beetles stripping trees and shrubs of their leaves in massive swarms. Already in 2018, calls have come in reporting the same feeding. Until more beetles emerge, we won't know if this year will be as bad as last year but for those battling the beetles there are treatment options.

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 in large quantities 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 you may hold them responsible for the damage.

The best part about Japanese beetles, if there is one, is their short live span. They only live 30-45 days. Although their swarms can seem devastating to your plants, their feeding will only temporarily stress trees and may be tolerable. Although trees may 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, consider control now.

For the organic gardener, a soapy bucket of water or a jar 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. Individual plants can be covered with a mesh or netting for the weeks 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 method to avoid are Japanese beetle traps, as they tend to attract more beetles than they contain.

Although 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, stop by the Extension Master Gardener Response Line at 1740 SW Western Ave. Monday-Friday from 1-5 pm.