

Green June Bugs Buzzing Homeowners!

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

This past week, while at the Geary County Free Fair, I had several people asking me about the “swarms” of big green beetles in their yards. Some people occasionally think that these critters are bees. It wasn't uncommon for homeowners to have these big beetles fly directly at them or even run into the side of their house.

While we do have some large bumblebees, and carpenter bees are well known for flying right at you (it's all a bluff by the way), these are actually an insect called the Green June Bug. It is a beetle, and like our other May or June bugs it is in the family known as scarab beetles, the same family as the sacred scarab beetle of ancient Egypt. The green June beetle is found throughout the eastern United States westward to Kansas and Texas.

June bugs (beetles) are the adult form of the many different white grubs that we find in our yards and gardens. As larvae, the grubs feed on the roots of plants, often on grass plants, but also on other organic matter in the soil. Some June bugs have a one year life cycle, others may take up to three years. Most all of our June or May bugs emerge as adults in late May through July. The adults mate and the females then lay eggs back in the soil for the cycle to start all over.

The green June bug has a one year life cycle. The eggs are laid in August and the small grubs start feeding on whatever organic matter they can find in the soil. As the soil starts to cool down in mid to late autumn, they burrow down deep enough to avoid the coldest weather of winter. In the spring they become active and continue to feed until they pupate in early June.

All grubs have six true legs which turn into the legs of the beetle when it pupates into the adult. The green June beetle has the rather uncommon practice of coming above ground at night. When it does, it doesn't use its legs for propulsion. It has rows of stiff hairs on its back and it moves around, on it's back, using these stiff hairs for locomotion. As this is a rather large beetle, the larvae itself can get quite large. As the grub get's close to pupation it can be two inches in length and quite thick.

In July to early August, the adults start to emerge. Unlike most adult May and June beetles, the green June beetle can be quite destructive. They are fond of ripening fruit and in the south they can be very destructive in peach orchards. The old timer's in the south referred to them as fig eaters.

The velvety green beetle has brownish yellow sides and orangish wings. They are strong flyers, but clumsy. They often just fly along until they run into something. They do not pose a risk to us, other than that they might fly in to you. They also make a loud buzzing noise when they fly, which is why some people mistake them for bees.

We have seen a real population explosion of these beetles in recent years for reasons that I can not explain. In general, chemical controls for the adults are not warranted unless they are feeding on fruits or vegetables. Sevin can be used to repel them and many of the synthetic pyrethroid garden insecticides will control them. This species is not generally considered to be a big threat to lawns, but this is the time of year that if you are going to have grub problems, it will show up. With cooler temperatures and recent rains, inspect areas of yards that don't seem to be greening up. In the mean time, don't be afraid of them. Ignore them or enjoy the antics of their attempted flight!