

## Japanese Beetles Are Increasing

### AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

In Kansas it is estimated that we have over 15,000 species of insects. If the temperature is very much above freezing, there are insects active somewhere! Of all those insects, some of the most obvious are beetles, especially those in the scarab beetle family. Scarabs have been mentioned for thousands of years in ancient writings and depicted in various forms of art dating back to ancient Egyptians. We are going to be most familiar with scarabs in the form of June beetles that we see from May through fall. Some are quite small, like the masked chafer, others are quite large and intimidating like the green June beetle.

It isn't often that a new insect makes its presence known, but that started happening about five years ago when the first Japanese beetles were found in Geary County. Japanese beetles aren't big, only a little over a half inch long and a little under a half inch wide. They have a metallic green head and thorax and coppery green wing covers. One of the most distinctive things about a Japanese beetle is the row of white spots along the sides of its abdomen.

With a name like Japanese beetle, it's pretty obvious that this is not an insect native to North America. The first record of Japanese beetles in the US was in 1916 from a nursery in New Jersey. It is generally felt that these beetles probably came over as larvae in a 1912 shipment of iris from Japan. Interestingly, as is often the case with a non-native organism that becomes a problem, Japanese beetles are not much of a pest problem in Japan because of natural controls. Remove the organism from the area where there are natural controls and you frequently have a problem!

Like all species of scarab beetles, the larval form is a grub. Eggs are laid by adults in the mid summer just under the soil surface and they hatch into the well known grub. The grub feeds on the roots of any number of plants and survives through the winter in a little cell it creates in the soil. Once the soil warms up, the grub resumes feeding. After four to six more weeks of feeding the grub forms a pupae, and then emerges as an adult beetle. The adult is probably the most destructive form of this insect. They will feed on the foliage of over 200 species of plants but appear to be especially fond of roses, grapes, crape myrtle bushes and linden trees. They tend to be somewhat gregarious and where you find one you are liable to find several.

They are easily controlled with most garden insecticides if you get the spray right on them. Permethrin, Sevin, and malathion will all work as will almost any insecticide labeled for use on ornamental plants. An alternative method is to go out every morning to their favorite plants and knock them off the foliage into a bucket with soapy water. I find something particularly satisfying in this method of control! Fortunately the adults are active for only about 30 to 45 days.

You can find Japanese beetle traps but I honestly discourage using these. They do attract Japanese beetles through the use of sweet smelling scents. Unfortunately many of the Japanese beetles never wind up IN the trap but end up on plants in your yard where they will feed. Ultimately you wind up with more Japanese beetles in your yard than you probably would have had otherwise.

Many of you haven't yet seen a Japanese beetle. But they are around, albeit in low numbers. But they will continue to increase in the years ahead and you will eventually encounter them. Keep an eye out for skeletonized leaves on your plants. If you can't find bagworms, start looking for Japanese beetles!