

Green Beetles Causing Chaos

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

Over the past few years we've seen two greenish beetles starting to cause chaos around our yards and gardens. One, the green June beetle, is native but in recent years they have become far more numerous. The other one, the Japanese Beetle, is not native to Kansas and really just started causing problems the past couple of years.

Green June beetles are BIG! They are about an inch long, quite broad, a very dark green color and if you find them not flying around they have a long narrow head. They do fly, not very well but they do fly. Many people mistake them for bumblebees as their flight is rather noisy. They also aren't very good navigators as they often fly into things; the side of your house, your car, you. While they are scary looking they really aren't much of a problem unless you have a fruit tree with fruit that's about to get ripe. They will start eating peaches or pears and just make a mess of a fruit. You first see one beetle on the fruit and the more you look you see that there are many on that one fruit. They can be controlled with most fruit or vegetable insecticidal sprays, but you have to get it right on them.

Japanese beetles are small by comparison, dainty compared to the green June beetle. They are an iridescent green with shiny copper colored wing covers. The real distinctive thing about Japanese beetles is that right below their wing covers, on the sides of their abdomen, they have several tufts of bright white hair. No other beetle that we have shows that. These are foliage eaters and they like to dine in company with other Japanese beetles. While they will eat leaves of many different species of trees and shrubs they do have some definite favorites. Roses, Virginia creeper, linden, apple, grape, birch and buckeye top their list! Their feeding often looks like something turned the leaves into lace. You rarely find just one, they are usually in small to large groups.

Both beetles are scarab beetles. They start off as an egg, hatch into what is commonly known as a white grub and feed on the roots of plants. Both have a one year life cycle. The adults are out now, feeding, mating and laying eggs. They are usually done with all three and gone by early to mid August. The larval form of both are not generally considered serious pests of lawn grasses etc. so we seldom treat for them like some of the other grub species.

About the only time I'd be spraying for green June beetles would be to protect my fruit. Just make sure that you are using a product labeled for fruit trees. Japanese beetles can decimate a rose garden. Nearly any of our lawn and garden insecticides will control them. Japanese beetles, when disturbed, or more likely to just fall off the vegetation and onto the ground rather than fly. If you take a small bucket of soapy water and a small paint brush into the yard early in the morning you can often just brush them into your soapy water where they will soon die!

You can now find Japanese beetle traps for sale in stores. These use two scent baits to attract the beetles. They use a female Japanese beetle pheromone to attract the males. They use a compound found in roses to attract the females. The big problem with these traps is that they attract far more Japanese beetles in to the area than ever find their way INTO the trap to die. The end result is far more Japanese beetles in your yard than you likely would have had otherwise, and while they are there, they just start eating. So, if you have a neighbor approach you offering to give you a couple of these Japanese beetle traps, be very suspect of their motive and politely decline them!