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Home Grounds, Gardens, Home Pests

Japanese Beetles in the Home Landscape

If you have not already seen these beetles in your landscape, be on the lookout. More and more Japanese or June Beetles as they are referred to are starting to appear in the landscape and cause damage to landscape shrubs, vegetable plants and especially herbaceous plants such as zinnias.

The Japanese beetle is a highly destructive plant pest native to Japan that was first found in the United States in southern New Jersey in 1916. In Japan, where the beetle's natural enemies keep its populations in check, this insect is not a serious plant pest, however, in the United States this beetle has no natural enemies.



The adult Japanese beetle is a little less than 1/2 inch long and has a shiny, metallic-green body with bronze colored outer wings. The beetle has six small tufts of white hair along the sides and back of its body under the edges of its wings. The males usually are slightly smaller than the females.

The adult Japanese beetles emerge from the ground and begins feeding on plants in June. Activity is most intense over a 4 to 6 week period beginning in late June, after which the beetles gradually die off. Japanese beetle's lifespan is about 30 to 45 days. During the feeding period, females intermittently leave plants, burrow about 3 inches into the ground and lay a few eggs. This cycle is repeated until the female lays 40 to 60 eggs. By midsummer, the eggs hatch, and the young grubs begin to feed. Each grub is about an inch long when fully grown and lies in a curled position. Often you will find these in the soil while planting new flowers or shrubs so if seen it is a good idea to remove them. In late autumn, the grubs burrow 4 to 8 inches into the soil and remain inactive all winter. This insect spends about 10 months of the year in the ground in the larval stage. In early spring, the grubs continue to feed on roots (including turf) and in late spring, pupate. In about 2 weeks, the pupae become adult beetles and emerge from the ground. This life cycle takes one year.

The adult beetles are general herbivores and are known to feed on over 400 species of broad-leaved plants, damaging leaves, flowers, and overripe or wounded fruit. The beetles usually



feed in groups, starting at the top of a plant and working down-ward. The beetles are most active on warm, sunny days, and prefer plants that are in direct sunlight. The beetles eat the leaf tissue between the leaf veins but leave the veins behind, which gives the leaves a skeletonized appearance. The adults will often attack flower buds and fruit. The grubs can kill small seedling plants but most commonly damage turf.

Control

Both the adults and grubs of the Japanese beetles can cause damage. The adult Japanese beetle are capable of flying in from other areas so controlling one life stage will not completely prevent potential problems. Control of the grub stage requires properly timed applications of a soil insecticide to the infested site. If you are having problems with armadillos in your lawn, vegetable garden or flower beds then it is a good chance you have grubs, possibly Japanese beetle grubs they are feeding on and a grub control product would help.

For additional reading on how to control Japanese beetle in your backyard visit

http://www.aphis.usda.gov/lpa/pubs/pub_phibeetle04.pdf or
<http://www.aces.edu/pubs/docs/A/ANR-1250/>

Source: Dr. Kathy Flanders, Extension Entomologist, Dr. Elina Coneva, Extension Fruit Crop Specialist and Dr. Edgar Vinson, Research Associate, Auburn University.