

Striped Cucumber Beetle causes damage

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I knew the day would come this summer when my cucumbers would be visited by the striped cucumber beetle.

Both striped and spotted cucumber beetles can cause serious damage on plants such as cucumbers and melons. In addition, I have seen considerable damage to perennial flowers when beetle populations are high. I rarely see the spotted cucumber beetle.

The beetles are about a quarter of an inch long and are a yellowish color with three black stripes down their back. The spotted one is similar except with 12 black spots on the back.

They overwinter in the soil as adults, emerge in the early spring and lay eggs. The beetles you are seeing now are this year's generation.

Both feed on foliage, flowers, and pollen. In addition to damaging flowers and foliage, they also carry bacterial wilt, a devastating disease for plants in the cucurbit family.

While feeding, the beetles carrying the bacterium infect the plant. The disease quickly spreads throughout the plant, blocking water, causing the plant to wilt.

Other cucumber beetles are attracted to the infected plants and continue to vector the disease to healthy plants.

There is nothing you can do once the plant is infected with the bacterium. Remove and dispose of the plants.

You can prevent the damage from occurring by preventing the beetles from feeding.

Row covers are effective for excluding the beetles in the early part of the season. However, the covers need to be removed in order for bees to pollinate; row covers are not the best method at this point.

Sprays are most effective now but will need to be applied on a regular basis during this period of heavy feeding. This can mean spraying every two weeks during peak activity (which is in the beginning stages right now in my area of northern Clark County).

The beetles are pretty good hidiers and might be hard to find. However, their damage is very visible on the leaf surface; tiny holes that turn brown around the outside edges are easy to see.

If you suspect cucumber beetles and can't find them, take a piece of paper and place under the vine. Knock on the leaves gently and chances are you will knock them onto the paper.

I found mine the other night by knocking them off the plant and onto my black fabric mulch.

Use a garden insecticide that is labeled for vegetables and says it controls cucumber beetles. These products would contain permethrin, esfenvalerate, or carbaryl.

If you have had a history with these beetles on your garden plants, next spring start early in the season at planting time using row covers. Remove for pollination and then switch to sprays.



Stripped Cucumber Beetle



Damage on cucumbers by cucumber beetle.