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Japanese Beetles: They're Back

Any day now, if not already, Japanese beetles will emerge and search out their favorite foods, in an effort to satisfy their seemingly insatiable appetite. They will gather on roses, cherry trees, crepe myrtles and even poison ivy for several weeks and then disappear sometime in August. In fact Adults feed on over 400 different kinds of trees, shrubs, flowers, vegetables, and crops.

These little gremlins are bright green and copper metallic (shinny) beetles. They have a row of five white dots on each side of their hinny. With a tendency to congregate and devour plants, they are #1 in most homeowners deck of cards.

The feeding damage of adult Japanese Beetles is unmistakable because most of the time they feed on the soft tissue between leaf veins. Once they have finished feeding, all that is left are the lacy veins of the leaf. They also feed on corn silks, which prevents pollination of the corn. Even their immature stage damage plants by feeding on grass roots and is a typical white grub.

Although a challenge, it is possible to protect your favorite plants from the beetles. Individual shrubs and small trees can be covered with netting. Chemical controls include carbaryl, (Sevin), malathion, cyfluthrin (Bayer Advanced Garden Rose & Flower Insect Killer) and esfenvalerate (Ortho Bug B Gon Garden and Landscape Insect Killer). Always read the label and know that during peak activity, foliage will need to be sprayed weekly to provide protection. Also, spray blooming plants late in the evening to avoid harming bees, which are a much needed pollinator.

It should be noted that most plants can tolerate moderate defoliation. Therefore, if the plant's appearance is not a concern, the beetles can be merely tolerated or picked off by hand. Picking is most easily done early or late in the day when the beetles are not as active and dropping them into a bucket of soapy water provides for a quick kill.

Also, traps are available to catch Japanese beetles; however I don't recommend using them. The problem is that thousands of the beetles may be drawn to the trap and they tend to feed, mate, and lay their eggs in your lawn before entering the trap. With friends I have joking said "Buy a trap and give it to your neighbor to draw the beetles away from your lawn." This doesn't work because the beetles will mate and lay eggs in his and your lawn causing grub problems and next year you both will have an abundance of beetles.

Japanese beetles lay their eggs and become grubs in your lawn. In large numbers they can damage your lawn; however, many homeowners blame other lawn problems on grub damage. To check for grubs, cut 3 sides of a 1 foot square in the lawn and use a shovel to peel it back. Examine the soil and roots in the top 2 to 4 inches. Repeat this process in several locations. Control is recommended if you find an average of more than 6 grubs per square foot. After determining that grubs are the problem, products containing carbaryl (Sevin) or trichlorfon (Dylox) have an immediate effect and should be used when grubs are feeding. Products containing imidacloprid or halfenozide are considered preventive and are applied in May to control grubs in the fall. Grub-Ex and Bayer Advanced Season Long Grub Control contain one of

these active ingredients. Best results are obtained when the insecticide is washed into the soil immediately after application. Also, Japanese beetle larvae are highly susceptible to milky spore disease. It is caused by the bacteria, Bacillus popillae, which is contained in the product, Milky Spore. It is applied to the lawn as a powder. Complete control is not achieved for 2-3 years but once the bacterium is established in the soil it provides control for 20-30 years.

To learn the specifics on gardening we have both free and for-sale publications at our office in the back of the Public Services Building on the corner of Third Loop and Irby. You may also visit our Home & Garden Information Center through our web site at www.clemson.edu/florence. I may be contacted through our web site, amelton@clemson.edu or 661-4800.