

Flea Beetles (various species, in the Family Chrysomelidae)



Figure 1 Damage on potato leaf



Figure 2 Crucifer (e.g., cabbage) flea beetle

Damage

The tiny adult flea beetles, that have a jumping action, chew many holes in the leaves. A heavily infested plant may look as if small shots had been fired into it. The foliage may be so badly eaten on many garden plants that the plants die. Larvae feed on the roots and tubers of host plants.

When Are They Active

Flea beetles become active in early spring when temperatures reach 50 degrees. Feeding attacks occur at any time in the plant lifecycle, from seedlings to mature plants. Flea beetles are most active during dry weather and sunny days.

Susceptible Plants

Adult flea beetles feed on the leaves of cabbage, kale, tomato, potato, cucumber, melon, grape, spinach, eggplant and related crops.

Prevention Methods

Check leaves (including undersides) every 1-2 days. Physical barriers such as row covers may help to protect plants from early damage. Row covers should be put in place when transplants are set or seeds are sown. Row covers should be removed before temperatures get too hot in mid-summer (often after 4 to 6 weeks). Keeping down weeds in and around the garden is also helpful.

Treatment Methods

When the weather is cool and beetles are less active, such as early morning, if flea beetles are on just a few garden plants, you may be able to brush them off the leaves into a large bowl or bucket containing water and a generous squirt of dish detergent, which prevents the beetles from floating or jumping out.

Additional Information/Resources

- UW Extension Garden Fact Sheet [A3720-E Flea Beetles](#)
- University of Minnesota Extension [Flea beetles in home gardens](#)
- Dane County UW Extension Horticulture Hotline [608-224-3721](tel:608-224-3721) (M-F, 9 am-12 noon, April 15 – October 31) or horticulture@countyofdane.com

Photo Credits: Figure 1- Whitney Cranshaw, Colorado State University, Bugwood.org; Figure 2-University of Minnesota Extension Flea beetles in home gardens Publication, photo by Jeff Hahn