

Japanese Beetles (*Popillia japonica*)



Figure 1 Adults and Damage



Figure 2 Larva(e)

Damage

While larvae eat the roots of grasses and ornamentals, it is the adult beetles who do the most damage in community gardens, eating leaves and flowers of many plant species. They consume the upper surface of leaves, but leave behind the veins, creating a “skeletonized” look to the leaf.

When Are They Active

Larvae become active and pupate in the spring and adults emerge in June, when they mate and lay eggs. Adults are most active in sunny afternoons, and prefer to shelter in ornamental plants. Eggs take about two weeks to hatch into grubs, who then begin eating roots through the summer, doing the most damage in August. They remain active until the temperature falls below 50°F.

Susceptible Plants

Adult beetles eat over 350 species of plants, including vegetables, fruits, grains, ornamentals, and trees. Some of their favorites are raspberry, grape, bean plants, as well as fruit trees and shrubs in the rose family.

Prevention Methods

Grubs need moist soil to flourish, so not watering during dry spells can curb their numbers. Geranium plants produce a compound that kills the beetles, so planting them can help. Floating row cover can be used on low crops. Early or late plantings circumvent feeding injury. There are many predators, including grackles, starlings, moles, shrews and skunks, but few native insects prey on Japanese beetles.

Treatment Methods

Handpick adults or tap infested leaves over a container of soapy water – the beetles will fall in and drown. Avoid baited traps: they attract extra beetles that will increase damage. Neem and pyrethrum sprays are “organic” insecticides that may be effective.

Additional Information/Resources

- UW Extension Bulletin [XHT1062 Japanese Beetle](#)
- University of Maryland [Extension Japanese Beetles - Edibles](#)
- Dane County UW Extension Horticulture Hotline [608-224-3721](#) (M-F, 9 am-12 noon, April 15 – October 31) or horticulture@countyofdane.com

