

May 2010

Extension Solutions for Homes and Gardens

by Paul J. Pugliese

“Protect Your Plants from Japanese Beetles”

Japanese Beetles and other summer beetles will soon be out chewing on your plants before you know it. June and July are the two months when our office gets the most calls about these destructive garden pests. Adult Japanese Beetles live for four to six weeks, lay eggs, and then die. During the rest of the year, these beetles live underground in a white grub stage feeding on the roots of grass and other plants before maturing into adult beetles the next summer. These plump, C-shaped white grubs are the ones that you have probably turned up in your garden while tilling soil in the spring. Unfortunately, the most visible damage is caused by the adult stage in a very short window of time.

The good news is that because the beetles only affect the leaves of trees and shrubs, plants which are otherwise healthy can tolerate significant leaf loss without long term consequences. Controlling the grub stages in your yard generally has little effect on the overall damage caused by adult beetles, since the adults can fly in to your yard from miles around. Most homeowners rarely have grub populations large enough to cause damage to home lawns. If lawn treatments are necessary, late summer and early fall applications are most effective at killing young grubs.

If you’ve had problems with Japanese Beetles in previous years, then there’s a good chance that they will return to your yard if you have some of their preferred plants in your landscape. Japanese beetles feed on over 300 species of broad-leaved plants, but some 50 species seem to be preferred. Commonly attacked hosts include peach, cultivated and wild grapes, raspberry, plum, roses, apple, cherry, corn, hibiscus, hollyhock, dahlia, zinnia, elm, horse chestnut, linden, willow, crape-myrtle, elder, evening primrose, and sassafras.

Management options for Japanese Beetles:

1. Monitor your plants closely in late May and early June. This is the time when adult beetles will start arriving on your property. The first round of beetles that arrive are known as “scouts” and when they find a good food source, they release scents which attract other beetles. The key is to catch these early arrivers as soon as possible. You can knock the adults off and kill them by dropping them into a container of soapy water. This is a good organic control option for small infestations.
2. Avoid planting flowers and plants that Japanese Beetles prefer. Plant non-attracting plants such as begonias, carnations, boxwoods, columbine, daisies, dogwood, forsythia, hollies, hydrangeas, junipers, and magnolias. Keep a garden journal of other plants that avoid beetle damage for future selections.
3. Several “lure” traps are available on the market. However, these traps are not recommended for general use in a small garden area. These traps can actually work too well and tend to attract more beetles into the area than would normally be present. Trapping should be done in areas isolated from gardens or landscapes in order to lure the beetles away from desired plantings.

4. Adult beetles can be controlled with the use of over-the-counter insecticides available at local garden centers. Recommended insecticides include products containing the active ingredient carbaryl, bifenthrin, cyfluthrin, deltamethrin, lambda-cyhalothrin, permethrin, and others. During the heavy adult activity periods, sprays may be needed every 5 to 10 days to protect high value, specimen plants like roses. Applications of a systemic insecticide containing imidacloprid (Bayer Advanced, etc.) generally need to be made 20 days before anticipated Japanese beetle adult activity, usually around mid-May. Systemic treatment options are not labeled for use on plants which produce edible fruits. Be sure to read and follow all labeled application rates and safety precautions when using any insecticides.

Paul Pugliese is the Agriculture & Natural Resources Extension Agent for Cherokee County Cooperative Extension, a partnership of The University of Georgia, The U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Cherokee County. (770) 479-0418. For more information and free publications, visit our local website at www.ugaextension.com/cherokee

###