



# The Beetles are Coming!

by The Garden Hoe, Lis Friemoth

It's that time of year that some of us dread. How could that be? Life in the garden is good - the flowers are looking fantastic, the fruit and veggies are ripening and the leaves are looking lush. What could there possibly be to dread. Well, it's time that time of year, again, for the arrival of the Japanese beetle. For such a pretty insect, it can devastate a lot of plant material in a very short period of time.

Understanding your opponent is the best way to figure out how to thwart them. Japanese beetles were originally introduced into New Jersey and as with most pests, has not respected geographic boundaries. Movement has been from the east coast north, south and west. Throughout areas of infestations, populations range from intense to spotty. The life cycle of these beetles is generally one year, two years has occurred in some areas. Eggs are laid in August, often straggling through September. Preferred egg laying areas is short, irrigated turf. The larvae will feed and mature underground, always staying below the frost level during the winter. Interesting tidbit – this beetle will produce its own anti-freeze for winter protection. Talk about a tough opponent. As the soil warms, the larvae will rise to the soil surface, feeding on turf roots until adult emergence in late June. If you happen to be walking across the grass during a heavy infestation emergence, the beetles actually fly up out of the grass as you walk. That can go either way on the “euwww” meter. For people like me it's kind of cool, for normal people it's pretty disgusting. In areas with long standing infestations of Japanese beetles, there seems to be an indication that natural predators – diseases, parasitic wasps, and large critters - do help to keep the larvae populations in balance. But as the beetles mature, there are really not many natural predators to maintain population control. In addition, they have a flight range that laughs in the face human control.

Control is an issue that most people with an infestation will consider. Unfortunately, at the time you are seeing them, control is reactive and not always the best timing for optimal efficiency. That being said, you will probably want to do something about them when you see them and the damage they cause. There are many sprays out there that are labeled for Japanese beetle control. Just make sure that you choose something that is specific to the tree, shrub, fruit, veggie, or flower that you intend to treat. Many products are quite effective but not always advisable for edible fruits and veggies. Be very careful! Always follow

the label directions exactly for application, re-entry period and pre-harvest intervals. Treating Japanese beetles during the grub stage can be quite effective if timing and application are done appropriately. The most vulnerable period is shortly after egg lay when the larvae are quite young and close to the surface of the soil. Treating the larvae (or grubs) at this stage will require a soil or turf application. Most garden centers, co-ops, and big box stores will have products for grub control. Check the labels to see how long the product will take to become and stay effective. Time your application accordingly, allowing for rain falls, irrigation schedules and larvae growth rates.

If you are not interested in killing with chemicals, there are a few options out there for you. Hand picking is one, albeit a tedious and unsatisfying one. As fast as you pick, more will come. For fruit such as raspberries, covering with cheesecloth so that edges of the cloth hang down over the raspberries about ten to twelve inches will give some control. But, big caution here, if you trap the beetles underneath – they will do even more devastating damage than if left uncovered. Hormone traps are often advertised as a way to trap the adults without chemicals. And while they do succeed in doing what they claim, these traps are designed to invite many, many, many beetles into your yard. As the adults already secrete attractant hormones, adding more reasons for them to get together in your yard is not a particularly good idea.

Although, there are many areas that have not experienced a widespread infestation, those of us who have, wish it were not so. And at first glance, this critter is beautiful. About the size of a dime, its bronze-green metallic coloring catches the eye, especially with the distinctive white striping around the outer edge of the body. But then you notice the destruction that follows in its wake. Fruit is beset with devastating damage; leaves are laid to waste with only a vein structure left to ever let you know there was anything there to begin with. What to do, what to do? With over 300 plant species on their menu, my choice is clear. Let the games begin.