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Japanese Beetles

This time of year, many of us are combating Japanese Beetles in our gardens and lawns. Similar in appearance to other June bugs, the adult Japanese beetle is 1/4 to 3/8-inch long with a shiny, metallic-green head. The body has bronze wing covers and five clumps of hair that border the sides of the abdomen. The larvae are cream-colored grubs with a light brown head about 1 ¼-inch long at maturity.

Adult female Japanese beetles lay eggs in July beneath wet lawns. Upon hatching, larvae feed on the sod roots and overwinter until the following summer. In June, the larvae pupate, and adult beetles emerge to feed above ground. Japanese beetles are incredibly destructive and feed on every part of the plant. The beetles skeletonize leaves and consume flowers and fruit entirely. Hundreds of varieties of plants can play host to this non-selective pest. Some plants, however, are more attractive to Japanese Beetles than others. If you are looking to put in new flowers, trees, or shrubs, reach out to our office for a list of plants that do not attract Japanese Beetles.

In many cases, you inevitably want to grow something that attracts these pests. As with any pest, it is good to check your plants daily for symptoms, so you know when to start taking measures to protect against damage. Controlling them is a challenge this time of year as new adult beetles emerge from underground daily over several weeks. In small quantities, beetles can be manually removed from plants and dropped into a bucket of soapy water. Mornings are the best time to observe as beetles are slower and easier to catch. Often you can shake the branches or leaves of your plant above a bucket, and the beetles will let go and fall into the bucket. If you have small scale plantings, you can cover your plants in a net to physically prevent the beetles from getting to your plants. This is difficult if you have a full-size tree, but can work well on dwarf trees, shrubs, and other plants.

While you can buy traps that lure Japanese beetles into a container where the pests can be gathered and disposed of, these are not recommended for controlling the beetles. The traps use pheromones used to attract beetles and can draw in even more beetles than would naturally appear. Not all these beetles may end up in traps and the result is, you may also catch native beetles as well. If you do use a trap, place it far away from your desirable plants to lure the beetles away from your garden or lawn instead of into it.

Insecticides such as cyfluthrin (Tempo), bifenthrin (Hi-Yield Bug Blaster II) and cyhalothrin (Bonide Beetle Killer, Spectracide Bug Stop Indoor + Outdoor Insect Killer, Spectracide Triazicide, Bonide Caterpillar Killer) can be used for Japanese beetle control with about two to three weeks protection. Carbaryl (Sevin dust) can also be effective but only for about one to two weeks. The downside of using such products is they will also eliminate parasitoids and other natural predators. Neem products (Natural Guard Neem-Py, Fertilome Triple Action Plus) and Pyola (pyrethrins in canola oil) can offer control for three to four days.