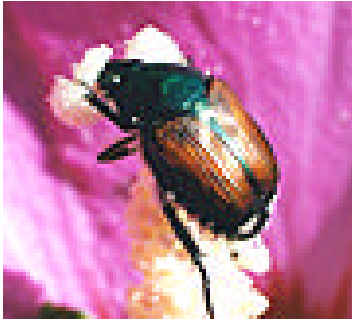


THE JAPANESE BEETLES HAVE ARRIVED!!!!



With the arrival of a few warm days, we feel that summer is almost here. Once summer arrives and the flowers are just about in their prime, we experience one of our most un-invited guests: the Japanese beetle. If you have never experienced the heartbreak of an almost perfect blossom shredded by the Japanese beetle, then you do not know the intense emotion evoked by the words “oh no, not Japanese beetles”.

Ok, now we get down to the practical aspects of dealing with the Japanese beetles. First of all, it is important to know the life cycle of the Japanese beetle in order to choose the most efficient control method. Japanese beetles are most common in June, July and August. At this time they mate and the female lays eggs 5 to 6 inches below the surface of the ground. The eggs develop into white grubs that feed on the roots of grasses until cooler weather when they descend 12 inches or more under ground and hibernate. They emerge in mid-spring and pupate in June.



The most efficient way to reduce the population is to reduce the population of grubs. Virginia Tech recommends a product called Milky Spore. This is a bacterium specific to the grubs. This product is spread on the ground and is absorbed. This results in the grubs dying before they can develop into beetles. The length of time that the spore is active in the soil depends upon the strain of the spore. Check the instructions on the bag when you buy the spore for the effective lifespan of the spore. Since the grubs hibernate over winter and pupate in early summer as mature beetles, the most effective time to apply Milky Spore would be early spring or late summer.

What can be done during the summer, when the beetles are present, before they begin to lay eggs? For a chemical free method, there is the “pick and drown” method – pick the beetles off individually and drop them in a pail of soapy water. They will drown. One problem is the disposal of the soapy water and beetle carcasses. The pick and drown method may be time consuming, and not a very pleasant past time. You may be able to “hire” by-standers to help at some nominal sum, such as a penny a beetle. With large infestations of Japanese Beetles, this is probably an impractical approach.

For more vigorous action you can apply a pesticide in the summer. Since the beetle adult is an active flyer, it is difficult to spray a pesticide to control them. Pesticides recommended include carbaryl (Sevin), methoxychlor, or Malathion. These products suggest you start applications late June or early July when the adults have emerged and begun to congregate on selected hosts and you may have to repeat as necessary into August. Japanese beetles seem to be a consistent problem even where

treatments have been applied. You should also remember these pesticides are highly toxic to bees and should not be applied when bees are flying.

A less aggressive summer approach is to make use of sex pheromones in the form of Japanese beetle traps. These are readily available and require little installation. Traps present the same problem as the soapy water solution; you have to dispose of the dead beetles. Another problem is that the traps attract beetles not only in your yard, but from the neighbor's yard as well and because of this, Virginia Cooperative Extension does not recommend the traps. If you decide to use beetle traps, you do not want to place them near desirable plants in fact, you want to place them as far away as possible from your plants.

So, here's to a happy summer with no Japanese beetles in your yard and few in the neighbor's yards.

If you have any other gardening, lawn, or landscape questions contact the Chesapeake Master Gardener Answerline by e-mail at gardener@agri.city.chesapeake.va.us or phone us at 382-6348. The Chesapeake Master Gardeners are trained volunteer educators for the Chesapeake office of Virginia Cooperative Extension, 310 Shea Drive, Chesapeake, VA 23322.