



Homegrown Horticulture

TIPS FOR SUCCESS IN YOUR OWN BACKYARD

Crucifer Flea Beetles

Crucifer flea beetles affect all of the Cole crops, as well as the related field crops (canola, mustard) and weeds.

This includes the many related vegetables, including broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, kale, kohlrabi, radish, rutabaga, and turnips. This little brown/black bodied beetle (adult form) jumps when disturbed and causes damage to plants of all ages, but is most damaging to young, tender seedlings.

Adults overwinter in leaf litter and rough areas nearby cultivated areas, emerging in spring when temperatures start to warm up for extended periods. Initially, they feed on weeds and other available plants until the host plants come up. The adults lay eggs at the base of host plants until about early July. Larvae feed on roots and then finish their development in the soil before emerging as adults to feed and then head for overwintering spots in the fall.

Damage from the flea beetles can vary, although one of the first symptoms is small, round holes in the seedling leaves (cotyledons) and young leaves. This symptom is referred to as “shot holes”. High populations can lead to extensive feeding and death of the young seedlings. You might also notice weaker plants, delayed or uneven maturity in affected plants, and missing plants. Feeding by the larvae can cause damage to root vegetables, but it is less noticeable than other root-feeding insect pests (e.g., cabbage maggots).

Adults tend to be most visible and most active in sunny and exposed areas. They are more active in hot, windy weather in spring and fall and feed more in warm, sunny, and dry conditions.

Delaying seeding can reduce damage by having the plants emerge after the initial adult emergence. Alternatively, using plant covers can reduce feeding, while speeding up plant growth and development. Control weeds in and around the crop to reduce the places where adults can feed and overwinter. Applying water from above during hot, dry weather can disrupt adult feeding.

