

Flea Beetles On Vegetables & Ornamentals

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Description:

Adult flea beetles are small and shiny. When disturbed, they jump. The western cabbage flea beetle, pale-striped flea beetle and western potato flea beetle are the most damaging species. They eat small holes in leaves and, during heavy infestations, the plant's growth is greatly reduced and it may die.

Common host plant(s):

There are several flea beetle species in New Mexico. These beetles commonly attack vegetable plants including tomatoes, potatoes, peppers, eggplant, cabbage, broccoli, beans, radishes, turnips, beets and lettuce as well as a whole host of ornamentals (notably primrose).

Damage:

Young plants, especially transplants, are severely damaged. Adults and larvae chew many tiny holes in leaves and feed on flower buds.

Distribution:

Throughout United States.

Lifecycle:

Flea beetles overwinter as adults under plant debris or on weeds and in soil adjacent to the garden. In early spring they begin feeding on crop foliage. Females deposit eggs near the soil line where larvae emerge in about a week. The larvae are white and worm-like and are found feeding on plant roots. Larvae feed for two to three weeks until reaching maturity and then pupate, emerging from the soil as adults in about two weeks. Larvae cause little damage, except for the western potato flea beetle, which tunnels into tubers. There are usually one to two generations of beetles in a year.

Cultural Control:

Use healthy, actively growing transplants and encourage their rapid establishment to prevent flea beetle attacks. Floating row covers also can exclude flea beetles from the garden. Remove weed and crop debris in the fall after harvest.

Organic/Biological Control:

Dust with diatomaceous earth or rotenone for serious infestations.

Chemical Control:

Treat with carbaryl when insects appear in damaging numbers. Repeat as needed. No waiting period is necessary between harvest and last application of carbaryl on beets, eggplant, tomatoe, corn and potatoe. **Caution:** *Application of carbaryl to tassel region of corn during the pollen shedding period will seriously reduce the bee population.* A 3 day wait is required after last application of carbaryl and harvest of broccoli, cauliflower, brussels sprouts and cabbage and head lettuce. For greens or leaf crops (turnips, kale, spinach, collards) and leaf lettuce a 14 day wait is required when carbaryl is the insecticide applied.

Carbaryl, Malathion or products containing acephate as their active ingredient can be used on ornamentals. Do not use systemic insecticides on fruits or vegetables.

Notice: Because pesticide labels can change rapidly, you should read the label directions carefully before buying and using any pesticides. Regardless of the information provided here, you should always follow the latest product label when using any pesticide. If you have any doubt, please contact the Cooperative Extension Service or pesticide dealer for the latest information on pesticide label changes.

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