

Flea Beetle

The Problem

Flea beetles are damaging to vegetable crops in both their adult and larval stages. An infestation of them will cause crops to be inedible and very unhealthy.

Identification

- Appearance: the adults are very small beetles, from 1/16th to 1/4 on an inch, and dark colored — often with a metallic sheen. When disturbed, they tend to hop away or fly off.



- Signs of damage
 - Adult beetles create irregular holes that look like shotgun patterns on the leaves.
 - Larvae feed on tubers and roots, causing their damage out of sight where the only indication is a plant that is weak or dying. As that's a very non-specific symptom, it's not a reliable indicator of flea beetles.

Controls

Understanding their life cycle is an important step in controlling them. Pupae spend winter below the soil. Adults emerge in the spring, munch on foliage, mate and deposit pale green eggs around the roots of the plants. The eggs hatch in 7 to 14 days. The destructive larval stage reaches full development in 2-4 weeks. After gorging themselves on roots and tubers, they pupate for 11 to 13 days. At that point, another generation of adults emerge to start the process all over again.

- Turning the soil after any crop is harvested disrupts the life cycle of flea beetles. Also ensuring the garden bed is free of overwintering weeds helps control the beetles.
- [Neem oil](#) and [insecticidal soaps](#) can be used to control the adults, but both are wide-spectrum controls and may also affect beneficial insects.
- [Sticky traps](#) can either be purchased or homemade. Again, these don't discriminate between harmful and beneficial insects. Just sayin'.

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- **Beneficial nematodes** attack the larvae in the soil.
- Diatomaceous earth cuts up soft-bodied insect larvae. However, it's usually rendered ineffective by every rainfall and needs to be reapplied frequently.
- Flea beetles hate the smell of coffee grounds.