

GARDEN COLUMN FOR THE SALISBURY POST

Darrell Blackwelder

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The recent rains were enough to soften the hard clay soil allowing Japanese beetle adults the opportunity to emerge. Isolated pockets of the pests are damaging ornamentals, fruits and vegetables throughout Rowan County.

Japanese beetles feed on over 275 different types of trees, shrubs, and vegetable plants. The beetle's favorite foods seem to be roses, grape foliage, peaches and plums along with okra and corn silks.

Easy to identify, the beetle is oval just under 1/2 inch long with a metallic green body with copper colored wings. Japanese beetles usually feed in groups easily devouring a rose bud or cherry leaf. When disturbed, the insect plays dead for a few seconds then immediately flies away slowly, in a circular motion.

The Japanese beetle female has a short life span of about 45 days is very productive, laying about 60 eggs on turf or sod. When the eggs hatch, the larvae feed on sod roots. An indication of severe infestation is large, dead patches of turf. The larvae then burrow 10 inches into the soil and pupate. These beetle pupae hatch in late spring initiating another life cycle. The beetle usually emerges often in the summer when a shower or irrigation softens the soil for easy emergence.

A regular spray program is one method of controlling the beetle. The insecticide, Sevin, applied as a dust or a liquid, controls the insect; however, this insecticide has a very short life and must be used as the insect appears. It may be

necessary to spray or dust every day when large populations of Japanese beetles are present.

Japanese beetle traps are often used as an alternative control method.

These traps coupled with a pheromone (sex attractant) that attracts the insect to the trap. The insect hits the vanes of the bright yellow trap and falls into a bag or a can for easy disposal. Research has shown that Japanese beetles are attracted to bright colors, especially "John Deere" yellow.

Don't place these traps near the plants your are trying to protect. In most instances the traps attract the beetles to the plants you are trying to protect.

Hand picking the beetles is another method of control if the beetle population is not too large. Dropping the beetles into a container of kerosene is very effective control method.

In the late '70's Milky spore was touted as an effective biological control method, but in most situations, its' use has not proven to be effective.

Darrell Blackwelder is an agricultural agent in charge of horticulture with the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service in Rowan County. For archived garden columns or other information, visit the Rowan County Master Gardener web site at www.rowanmastergardener.com , e-mail Darrell_Blackwelder@ncsu.edu