JAPANESE BEETLE

Coleoptera: Scarabaeidae

Popillia japonica

Bug of the Month

Background. These beetles are generalist pests that feed on over 300 plant species including vegetables, ornamentals, and fruit crops such as blackberry and grape. As a grape pest, they defoliate the vines during summer; on sunny days, they congregate near the upper part of the vine canopy to feed on new leaves and mate. When feeding on grapevines, adults tend to ingest only the soft tissue between veins, which gives the leaves a skeletonized appearance.

Biology. The Japanese beetle adult is 0.6 inches in length. It has a glossy green body and copper-colored front wings. Eggs are spherical and white. Fully grown larvae (grubs) are 1.18 inches in length, white, with a C-shaped body and a brown head capsule. There is only one generation per year. The cycle starts in spring, when the third instar overwintering larvae move from deep in the soil to the surface to feed on grass roots. Larvae pupate underground in May. After about 2 weeks, the adults emerge from the soil to feed on foliage and find mates throughout the summer. Eggs are laid in moist soil and hatch after about two weeks. Females break from feeding on plants to visit the soil several times over a period of about two weeks: She lays just two to four eggs at a time, resulting in 40 to 60 total eggs during her life. Young larvae feed on grass roots until winter arrives, at which point they bury themselves several inches below the soil surface to overwinter, which starts the cycle again.

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