

Spotted cucumber beetle

(*Diabrotica undecimpunctata howardi*)

What does it look like?

The spotted cucumber beetle is a small (6-9 mm), oblong beetle with a greenish-yellow body, a black head and 12 distinct black spots on its wing covers. Larvae are small (9-19 mm), yellowish-white with a dark brown head and a dark patch on their tail. They have three pairs of tiny legs.



Adult spotted cucumber beetle .



Damage to seedlings caused by larvae feeding.

Which crops are affected?

The spotted cucumber beetle is highly polyphagous, feeding on over 200 plant species. Cucurbits (cucumber, melon, squash), corn, beans and sweet potato are among the most economically impacted crops.

What does damage look like?

Adults cause direct feeding damage to foliage, flowers, and fruit. Look for chewed leaves or leaves eaten out between the veins. Flowers may be damaged or destroyed and feeding scars can be seen on fruit. Larval damage to roots reduces water and nutrient uptake, and feeding can cause girdling and death of seedlings.

Spotted cucumber beetles can vector diseases including bacterial wilt (*Erwinia tracheiphila*), squash mosaic virus and cucumber mosaic virus. Disease-related losses are often greater than those from direct feeding.



Feeding by adult spotted cucumber beetle causes damage to leaves, often in a 'lace-like' pattern where the leaf tissue between leaf veins is eaten.



Scars on surfaces of eggplant (L) and cucumber (R) fruit caused by cucumber beetle feeding.

Where do they currently occur?

Cucumber beetles rank among the most damaging insect pests of cucurbit crops across North America and are of increasing concern in vegetable-growing regions worldwide. Two species dominate in America - the spotted cucumber beetle, also known as the southern corn root worm and the striped cucumber beetle (*Acalymma vittata*). Neither occur in Australia. The spotted cucumber beetle is currently found across the continental United States, into southern Canada and Mexico.

Lifecycle

In warmer regions, adult beetles over winter, for example, under crop debris and fence rows becoming active when temperatures exceed 13–18°C. They may initially feed on pollen and nectar from early flowering plants before migrating to host crops as seedlings emerge. Non-crop hosts can serve as early-season refuges and disease reservoirs. Eggs are deposited in moist soil at the base of host plants. Newly hatched larvae feed on root hairs and outer tissues, while older larvae burrow deeper into the root. Larvae pupate in the soil and new adults emerge to feed. The lifecycle takes 30–60 days depending on weather.

How do they spread?

Adult beetles are strong fliers, and high-altitude air currents can disperse them over large distances. In North America, populations in northern regions typically overwinter in southern states and migrate northward each season.

How can they be managed?

Early intervention reduces population build up. Cultural controls such as reflective mulches, row covers over seedlings, crop rotation, perimeter trap cropping, and destruction of crop residues are used to reduce pest pressure. Chemical options are available, while natural enemies such as tachinid flies, braconid wasps and wolf spiders can also contribute to suppression.

What should I look for?

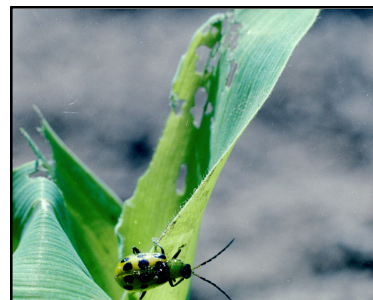
Monitor for beetles on young plants, inspecting leaves, stem bases, and flowers. Yellow sticky traps are used to monitor population build-up. Confirm any suspect beetles with a diagnostic laboratory.



Damage to roots of corn caused by larval feeding



Feeding damage on green beans



Adult beetle on sweet corn; feeding damage on leaves



Adult beetle and feeding damage on broccoli

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