In the Garden: Controlling cucumber beetles can prevent bacterial wilt

K-State horticulture expert shares tips to control garden pest

By Maddy Rohr, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. — If gardener’s cucumbers turned brown and died last year, they may want to blame cucumber beetles for infecting the plants with bacterial wilt. Kansas State University horticulture expert Ward Upham said early prevention is essential to avoiding a repeat.

“There are two types of cucumber beetles: striped and spotted. The striped cucumber beetle is the most common, but both can carry this disease,” Upham said.

Cucumber beetles are ¼-inch-long and are yellow and black.

“Young plants can be protected with row covers, cones, or other types of mechanical barriers,” Upham said. “Edges must be sealed to ensure that the beetles do not find a place to enter.”

Upham said the plants will eventually outgrow these barriers, or they will need to be removed to allow insects to pollinate the flowers.

“Apply insecticides before beetles are noticed in the planting. Continue to spray weekly throughout the season,” Upham said.

Upham recommends permethrin (Bonide Eight Vegetable, Fruit and Flower Concentrate and Hi Yield Garden and Farm Insect Control).

“Once plants have started flowering, spray in the evening after bees have returned to the hive and the flowers are closed,” Upham said.

Upham and his colleagues in K-State's Department of Horticulture and Natural Resources produce a weekly Horticulture Newsletter with tips for maintaining home landscapes and gardens. The newsletter is available to view online or can be delivered by email each week.
Interested persons can also send their garden and yard-related questions to Upham at wupham@ksu.edu, or contact your local K-State Research and Extension office.

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