What’s munching on your garden vegetables?

K-State horticulture expert suggests ways to deal with blister beetles

By Jessica Jensen, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. — A pest with a funny name is notorious for quickly stripping vegetables -- especially tomatoes -- and ornamentals of their foliage, said Kansas State University horticulture expert Ward Upham.

He said there are several species of blister beetles that vary in size and color. They are often between ½ to ¾ inch long and black, gray or brown striped. “Most are recognized by their elongated, narrow, cylindrical, soft bodies with middle body part narrower than the head of wing covers,” Upham said.

Upham said picking blister beetles is the best nonchemical control method.

“Wear gloves and use caution because these beetles contain a substance called cantharidin,” he said. “On tender human skin, body fluids of adult blister beetles may cause large, erect, watery blisters.”

“Chemical control of blister beetles is also possible and may be the only practical method of control if populations are large,” Upham said.

He recommends two kinds of chemical control:

- Permethrin (Bonide Eight and Hi-Yield Lawn, Garden and Farm Insect Control)
- Cyfluthrin (BioAdvanced Vegetable and Garden Insect Spray)

“Cyfluthrin and permethrin have zero day waiting period on tomatoes,” 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. 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.

Brand names mentioned in this article are used for identification purposes only. Endorsement or critique of any product is not intended.

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