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Utah State University Extension
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BUMBLE FLOWER BEETLE

The bumble flower beetle is a common member of the scarab beetle family. Its name comes from the fact that the adult beetles may be mistaken for bumble bees. (they fly close to the ground and emit a loud buzzing sound similar to that of a bumble bee).

Description and Occurrence

Adult bumble flower beetles are 12-16 mm (7/16 - 5/8 inch) in length and 8-10 mm (5/16 - 3/8 inch) wide. They have yellowish-brown or cinnamon-colored elytra with irregular longitudinal rows of small black spots, many of which may be rectangular. The head and thorax are densely hairy, as is the underside of the body, the latter being clothed with numerous white hairs. Legs are a reddish-brown color. When captured, adults may emit a defensive chemical with a pungent chlorine-like odor.

Bumble flower beetles are widely distributed in the United States and may be found from Connecticut to Florida and westward to Oregon and Arizona. Literature records indicate their occurrence in most other western states. These include California, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, and Utah.

Life History

Adult beetles become active during the first warm days of spring. In Indiana, they have been recorded from March 20 to August 17. In Utah, specimens have been submitted as early as May 11 and as late as September 26, which would seem to indicate that their season of activity is somewhat later here than in the Midwest.

The larvae develop in soil or other substrates containing a large amount of organic matter. Such areas include the edges of old hay or straw stacks, soil containing decaying vegetation or manure, rotten wood, or humus. They may be abundant in areas where spoiled vegetables are dumped.

The new generation matures and pupates in July. pupae may be found in soil at a depth of two to five inches inside oval earthen cells constructed by the larvae. In Utah, adults of the new generation emerge and become active in mid-August through about the end of September, then they seek a place to overwinter. There is a single generation per year.

Damage and Control

Adult bumble flower beetles are reported to injure corn in the milk stage although this problem is seldom if ever reported in Utah. Such damage can be severe but is usually limited to local areas. They also feed on flowers, ripe fruits such as apples, pears, peaches, and grapes and on sap exuding from tree wounds. The adult beetles are attracted to fermenting sugar baits. For this reason, they may be found feeding on injured fruit or vegetables.

One of the most common situations where the adult beetles are found is in association with bacterial slime fluxes on willows and poplars (bark/cambial infections). The beetles are attracted to the sap exudations and fermentation that occur with these infections.

At least in Utah, bumble flower beetles are secondary pests of minor importance. since they primarily feed on sap exudations, specific control is usually not required or recommended. Instead, control measures should be directed at eliminating the cause of the sap flow. The adult beetles are not injurious to trees in this situation, and it is questionable whether they should even be considered pests.

If bumble flower beetles are damaging corn or fruit, removal of accumulations of decaying organic matter from the vicinity of the crop should provide some degree of control.

There are no insecticides specifically recommended for control of bumble flower beetles on corn or fruit, but insecticides registered for the control of other chewing pests would probably be effective. In our region, chemical control should seldom, if ever, be necessary.

Larvae of the bumble flower beetle may be damaging in some situations when they disturb soil near the roots of trees or plants. Given the habits of the larvae, control measures would be best directed at the adult stage or at eliminating suitable habitats for the larvae by reducing the amount of organic matter present.

Precautionary Statement

All pesticides have both benefits and risks. Benefits can be maximized and risks minimized by reading and following the label. Pay close attention to the directions for use and the precautionary statements. The information on pesticide labels contains both instructions and limitations. Pesticide labels are legal documents, and it is a violation of federal and state laws to use a pesticide inconsistent with its labeling. The pesticide applicator is legally responsible for its proper use. Always read and follow the label.

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