Utah State University
DigitalCommons@USU

All Archived Publications | Archived USU Extension Publications

1-1-2002

Squash Bugs Begin Annual Attack On Zukes and Cukes

Dennis Hinkamp
Utah State University

Warning: The information in this series may be obsolete. It is presented here for historical purposes only. For the most up to date information please visit The Utah State University Cooperative Extension Office

Recommended Citation
Hinkamp, Dennis, "Squash Bugs Begin Annual Attack On Zukes and Cukes" (2002). *All Archived Publications.* Paper 843.
http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/extension_histall/843

This Report is brought to you for free and open access by the Archived USU Extension Publications at DigitalCommons@USU. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Archived Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@USU. For more information, please contact becky.thoms@usu.edu.

Utah State University Extension
electronic publishing

GARDEN NOTES

SQUASH BUGS BEGIN ANNUAL ATTACK ON ZUKES AND CUKES

By Dennis Hinkamp

June 2002 Summer - 49

Squash bugs travel from all over the country just to feed on Utah's renowned zucchini crop. Well, maybe not, but it is sort of a chicken or the egg argument.

The adult bugs emerge from protected over-wintering sites in the spring and seek out host plants in the cucurbit family - squash, pumpkin, cucumber, gourd, watermelon and cantaloupe, says Diane Alston, Utah State University Extension entomologist.

Squash bugs preferentially feed and reproduce best on squash and pumpkins, but they will also feed on cucumber, watermelon and muskmelon, she explains. The insect inserts its stylet-like mouthparts into the plant's vascular system to feed and can cause plants to wilt and eventually die. Recent research has found that densities as low as two squash bug adults per two-leaf stage seedling can kill squash plants. Older plants can tolerate more squash bugs, but even large plants can suddenly wilt from too much squash bug feeding injury.

You can actually use the ubiquitous zucchini as a squash bug decoy, Alston says. A cultural technique that may be effective is to plant zucchini, a preferred squash host, early in the gardening season before the squash bugs are numerous. By the time squash bug numbers increase on the zucchini, you will probably have had your fill of zucchini for the season, and can destroy the plants and squash bugs harbored on them. In this way zucchini can serve as a trap crop and help remove a portion of the population that will attack later maturing cucurbits.

More long term preventive steps should be taken in the fall to minimize overwintering squash bugs, she says. When you are finished with your crop for the season, remove the plants and effectively compost, burn or send them to the landfill. In the fall, rototill your garden to fully remove all plant debris that may harbor overwintering insects. (This is effective for many other insects, such as Mexican bean beetle and Colorado potato beetle, too.) Remove stacks of wood, debris or other protected spots near your garden where insects may try to hideout for the winter.

In the spring and summer, check squash plants regularly for eggs, young and adult squash bugs. Look on the underside of leaves, vines and fruit where the insect congregates, Alston says. Eggs are brownish red and laid in clusters. Young, called nymphs, are light gray while adults are mottled brownish gray and about 5/8 inch long.

An effective non-chemical approach is hand picking or simply squashing the squash bugs, she adds. Wear gloves and manually destroy the insects two to three times per week when

they are most active. Start when eggs and young are first found and if you are diligent, no further controls may be necessary.

Adult squash bugs are fairly resistant to insecticides, so if you choose to use an insecticide, begin when nymphs first begin to hatch from eggs, she says. It is necessary to spray underneath plants where the insects hide and thoroughly cover the underside of vegetation. Malathion, diazinon, carbaryl (Sevin), and rotenone (for nymphs only) are effective insecticides. Apply insecticides in the evening when they will dry slower and are often more effective in killing insects.

Utah State University is committed to providing an environment free from harassment and other forms of illegal discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age (40 and older), disability, and veteran's status. USU's policy also prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in employment and academic related practices and decisions.

Utah State University employees and students cannot, because of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, or veteran's status, refuse to hire; discharge; promote; demote; terminate; discriminate in compensation; or discriminate regarding terms, privileges, or conditions of employment, against any person other wise qualified. Employees and students also cannot discriminate in the classroom, residence halls, or in on/off campus, USU-sponsored events and activities.

This publication is issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work. Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Jack M. Payne, Vice President and Director, Cooperative Extension Service, Utah State University. (EP/06/2002/DF)