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Plant Pest Visual Identification Guide

What's that bug eating my plants? Identify common insect pests from photos

Written by **Gardener's Supply Co.**
Last updated: March 27, 2025 | 5 min read

Most insects are not pests. In fact, out of all the millions of known species, a small minority of insects and mites cause trouble for gardeners. This photo gallery is here to help you to determine if the creatures you see in your garden are likely to help or harm your plants. Click on a insect's name or photo for a complete description.

Identify Beneficial "Bugs" in Your Garden

This category includes beetles, wasps, and other insects that are predators and parasites of garden pests. These insects are good bugs that should be encouraged to hang around your garden. They help keep your garden's ecosystem in balance.

Ladybugs
Where: On plants infested with aphids, whitefly, and mealybug
Attract them with: flowers from the daisy and dill families, a water source

Parasitic Wasps
Where: On plants infested with whitefly, aphids, scale, caterpillars, etc
Attract them with: flowers from the daisy and dill families, a water source

Green Lacewing
Where: On plants infested with aphids, whitefly, mites, and mealybugs
Attract them with: flowers from the daisy and dill families, a water source

Identify & Control Caterpillars in Your Garden

They are the larval forms of butterflies and moths. They have chewing mouthparts, and their voracious feeding can quickly destroy leaves and flowers.

Tomato Hornworm
Where: Leaves and fruits of vegetables (tomato family) and flowers (nicotiana)
Controls: Bt, beneficial insects, handpicking, pyrethrins

Codling Moth
Where: Fruits of fruit trees (apples, pears)
Controls: Beneficial insects, cleaning up dropped fruit, phosmet

Cabbageworm
Where: Leaves and flowers of vegetables (cabbage family)
Controls: Bt, beneficial insects, pyrethrins;, row covers

Cabbage Looper
Where: Leaves and flowering heads of cabbage family crops
Controls: Bt, beneficial insects, row covers

Corn Earworm
Where: Corn leaves, silks, and kernels
Controls: Bt, cultivation, mineral oil on silks

Pickleworm
Where: Leaves, stalks, and fruit of cucumber family plants
Controls: Bt, timed planting, removal of overwintering sites

Identify & Control Beetles in Your Garden

These hard-shelled insects have chewing mouthparts. Both adults and larvae may feed on leaves and fruits, though the larvae (grubs) of some kinds, such as Japanese and cucumber beetles, feed on plant roots.

Colorado Potato Beetle
Where: Leaves of vegetables (eggplant, potato) and flowers (nicotiana, petunia); except in California
Controls: Bt, handpicking, neem, early planting, pyrethrins, row covers

Cucumber Beetle
Where: Leaves, flowers, and roots of many vegetables (cucumber family) and flowers
Controls: pyrethrins, row covers

Curculio
Where: Flowers and fruits of fruit trees (apple, peach, plum), and some flowers
Controls: Clean up dropped fruit, phosmet

Japanese Beetle
Where: Leaves, flowers, and fruits of fruit trees (apple, cherry, plum), vegetables (beans), flowers (roses), ornamentals (apple family); east of the Mississippi
Controls: Handpicking, milky spore, neem, nematodes, pyrethrins

Mexican Bean Beetle
Where: Leaves of vegetables (beans); except in the Northwest
Controls: Beneficial insects, squishing eggs, neem, early planting, oil (young plants only), pyrethrins, soap (young plants only)

Flea Beetle
Where: Leaves of many vegetables and fruits
Controls: Diatomaceous earth, neem, oil, pyrethrins, row covers

Asparagus Beetle
Where: Developing spears and ferny foliage
Controls: ladybeetles; handpicking; neem oil

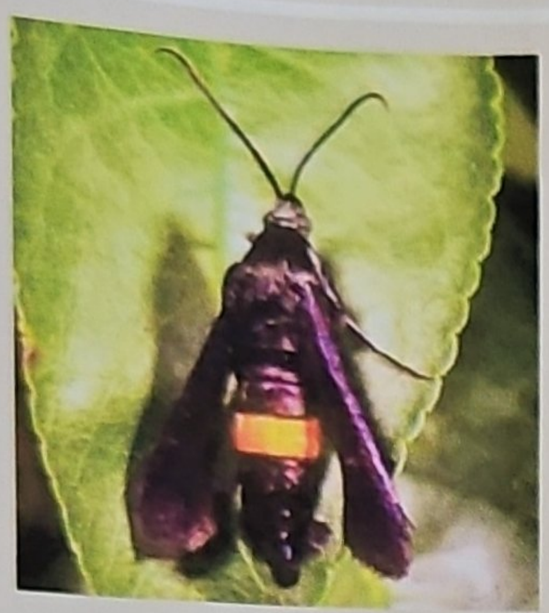
Corn Rootworm
Where: larvae found in roots; beetles found on silks and tassels
Controls: crop rotation, encourage natural predators, control weeds

Sweet Potato Weevil
Where: Grubs feed on roots and vines; adults feed on leaves and vines
Controls: Plant certified stock, rotate crops, mound soil around base of vines, sanitation

Identify & Control Borers in Your Garden

These beetle and moth larvae chew (bore) their way into trunks, crowns, and stems of many plants. Borers holes provide entry to infectious diseases, leading to rot that can kill plants. They are difficult to control with sprays, since spraying must be timed before the pest actually enters the plant.

Squash Vine Borer
Where: Stems of vegetables (squash family); except west of Rocky Mountains
Controls: Bt, handpick, early planting, resistant plants (butternut squash), row covers



Peach Tree Borer
Where: Trunks of fruit trees (plum, peach, cherry); except in north central and southern-most states
Controls: Squish by sticking wire in hole, nematodes

European Corn Borer
Where: tassels, leaves, and stalks of corn; also tomatoes, potatoes, and peppers.
Controls: Bt, destroy or plow under spent cornstalks

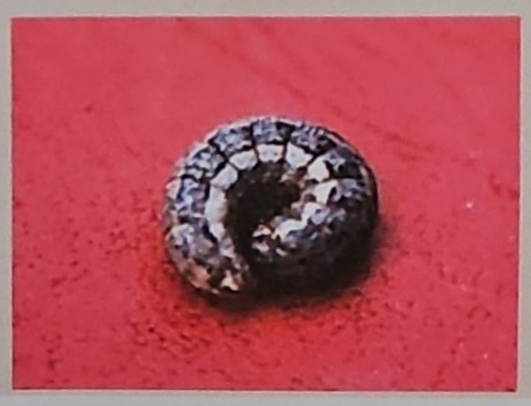
Identify & Control Grasshoppers in Your Garden

These pests can quickly chew plants to the ground. They are mostly a problem late in the summer when the adult population is high.

Grasshoppers
Where: Leaves, stems, and fruits of many flowers, fruits, ornamentals, and vegetables
Controls: Grasshopper protozoa (*Nosema locustae*), row covers

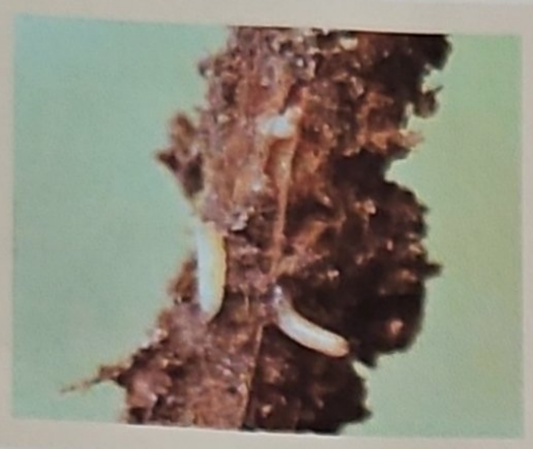
Identify & Control Garden Pests at or Below Ground Level

This general category includes pests that damage stems, leaves, and roots from underground. They are often difficult to find, but their damage can be devastating.



Cutworm
Where: Leaves and stems of many flowers, fruits, and vegetables
Controls: Homemade barriers, nematodes

Wireworm
Where: root crops and tubers, sown seeds of corn
Controls: Cultivation, crop rotation, beneficial nematodes



Root Maggot
Where: Roots and fruits of vegetables (cabbage, onion) and fruit trees (apple)
Controls: Homemade barriers, nematodes, row covers, sticky traps

Earwig
Where: Leaves and flowers of many vegetables, fruits, flowers, and ornamentals
Controls: diatomaceous earth (DE), homemade traps, pyrethrins, soap

Fire Ants
Where: In mounds in the soil and in wooden structures
Controls: Beauvaria bassisana, boiling water, beneficial nematodes

Identify & Control Small Insects in Your Garden

This catch-all group includes common insects and other hard-to-see creatures that cause obvious damage to plant parts by sucking (such as aphids, mites, and thrips) or chewing (leaf miners). Many are easily controlled if caught before their populations grow large.

Aphids
Where: Leaves, stems, and roots of many vegetables, fruits, flowers, and ornamentals
Controls: Beneficial insects, neem, oil, pyrethrins, row covers, soap, water spray

Leafminer
Where: Leaves of vegetables (spinach), flowers (lilac), fruit trees (apple), and ornamentals (birch)
Controls: neem, oil, pyrethrins, row covers

Mealybugs
Where: Leaves and stems of many flowers, fruits, and ornamentals
Controls: Beneficial insects, oil, pyrethrins, soap

Scale
Where: Stems and leaves of many flowers, fruits, and ornamentals
Controls: Beneficial insects, neem, pyrethrins (young only)

Mites
Where: Leaves, stems, and flowers of many vegetables, flowers, fruits, and ornamentals
Controls: Beneficial insects, oil, soap, water spray

Thrips
Where: Leaves and flowers of many flowers, fruits, ornamentals, and vegetables
Controls: Beneficial insects, diatomaceous earth (DE), oil, soap, sticky traps, water spray

Whiteflies
Where: Leaves, flowers, and fruits of many flowers, fruits,

ornamentals, and vegetables; in the Southeast and Southwest
Controls: Beneficial insects, neem, oil, pyrethrins, soap, sticky traps

Identify & Control True Bugs in Your Garden

This group of sucking insects is best identified by the distinctive X-shape on their back. Their young (nymphs) resemble the adults and attack leaves, flowers, and fruit.

Squash Bug
Where: Leaves and flowers of vegetables (squash family)
Controls: pyrethrins, row covers, squishing eggs

Tarnished Plant Bug
Where: Leaves, flowers, and fruits of soft fruits (strawberry), flowers (daisy), vegetables (beet)
Controls: Beneficial insects, pyrethrins (spray before flowering), row covers

Stinkbugs
Where: stems and shoots of tomato, potato, okra, squash, beans, and others
Controls: Control weeds in the area; insecticidal soap against nymphs; cultivation

Questions?
For more information, Ask our in-house gardening experts.

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