

# LivingWithBugs Guide

## identification, life cycles and management

### Spotted Cucumber Beetles

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Spotted cucumber beetles (*Diabrotica undecimpunctata ssp.*; there are eastern and western US subspecies) are about 1/4" long, greenish-yellow in color with 12 black spots on the wing covers. Adult beetles feed on foliage, stems and blossoms of cucurbits (melons, all kinds of squash, cucumber), potato, tomato, beet, eggplant and many ornamentals, except conifers, often severely damaging seedlings. Most garden vegetable plants, in fact, can be damaged by this insect. Adults also transmit a bacterial wilt disease to cucurbits. Larvae (grubs) live in the soil feeding on plant roots. Larvae are called rootworms. There are 2 - 3 generations per year and it is the adult stage that overwinters.

**Control** Chemical control in gardens is probably not necessary. While farmers may use soil-applied insecticide to control rootworms, gardeners can effectively manage cucumber beetles using row covers. Row covers are light fabric covers that allow water and sunlight to pass but block insects. Row covers are also effective

against aphids and other foliage-feeding insects. Be sure to remove row covers as flowers develop or you will inhibit bee pollination!

It is especially important to protect young seedlings as they emerge from soil. New transplants need protection, too. Once garden plants develop a healthy root system and full set of foliage they can

sustain a lot of foliage loss from insect feeding. Unless damage is severe it is probably not necessary to control this insect in landscape plantings.

An important exception might be cut flower production. In this case, where damage tolerance is low, you may need to resort to an insecticide that also deters feeding. Try one that contains natural pyrethrum. You'll need to reapply every few days because pyrethrum breaks down rapidly. It is relatively low in toxicity.

See [www.LivingWithBugs.com](http://www.LivingWithBugs.com) for additional information.



Spotted cucumber beetle (probably the western subspecies) on flower. Photo by Elizabeth DeAngelis. Copyright 2005 [www.calyphoto.com](http://www.calyphoto.com)