



SQUASH BUG

From what we are seeing and hearing this year, GP gardens are bursting at the seams with huge squash plants. Squash are so vigorous and so expansive, that they can seem invincible, but they have a formidable foe. Squash bugs are members of the stink bug family, and create large colonies that can quickly overrun a squash bed and ruin your harvest.

Squash bugs are dull brown insects between a half to an inch long, with a distinctive triangular shaped front end. They lay clusters of maple syrup colored eggs on the underside of squash leaves (*photo right*). Within a few days, these hatch into pale grey, oval nymphs which begin piercing the vine and sucking out the juices. This weakens the vine and the toxins secreted by squash bugs cause diseased patches that turn first yellow and then dark brown, eventually killing the vine.

Adults and nymphs prefer to hide on the underside of leaves, particularly around the base of the vine or underneath developing squash. Avoid mulching your squash garden with straw or hay because this gives them a great place to hide.

Wearing gloves, (those vines are prickly remember!) check your squash vines each morning. Flip over the leaves and look for the egg clusters. Either scrape them off with a wet table knife, or use a piece of duct tape to pull them off the leaves. Crush them and place in the trash.

One of the most effective ways of disposing of both adults and nymphs is to lay thick cardboard around the base of the vine and under developing squash. Take another piece of cardboard with you when you check your plants. Lay that piece on the floor next to the raised bed, quickly lift up the cardboard from under the vine, check for bugs, and if you find some, press it face down onto the extra piece and step down hard. You can also shake outliers into a dish of soapy water. Game over for now, but you'll need to be back on the job tomorrow, because squash bugs are tenacious little stinkers.



Both: adult squash bug (top photo credit: Jenn Forman-Orth, right: Dave Govoni)

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Garden Insects of North America: The Ultimate Guide to Backyard Bugs | Whitney Crenshaw

The Organic Gardener's Handbook of Natural Pest and Disease Control | Jeff Ball