

BEAN BEETLE



Watch out—that pretty orange ladybug isn’t as innocent as she looks! In fact, she might be a Mexican bean beetle about to munch your bean plant leaves. You’ve probably heard that ladybugs (or ladybirds) are great for your garden and in most cases, this is true. Most species of ladybugs are carnivorous and enjoy snacking on troublesome aphids or other small insects we’d just as soon be rid of, but there are a very few species that prefer tasty greens instead. The Mexican bean beetle is one of them. The adults are oval shaped, copper-colored, and have 16 black spots on their backs. You might find the beetle in an earlier stage of growth, so keep an eye out for clusters of small yellow or orange-yellow eggs on the undersides of your bean plant leaves. The larval stages look like another creature entirely—yellow, slug-like and spined—but don’t be fooled as they’ll eventually shed this skin for their coppery adult shell.

When bean beetles feed on plant leaves, they strip away the leaf tissue between the veins, giving the leaves a lacy, skeletonized look. Over time, the veins themselves will rot out, leaving large, ragged holes in the leaves.

Row cover in early summer is a great preventative method, but if you’ve already found the egg sacks in your garden, squish them straight away to prevent infestations from getting a strong foothold. If you find young larva or adult beetles, grab your trusty cup of soapy water and flick the beetles into it to kill them. Once you’ve found them, check your plants daily for good early season control.



Clockwise from top: Adult Mexican bean beetle (photo credit: Jenn Forman-Orth), bean beetle life cycle with pencil tip for size comparison (photo credit: Purdue University), adult beside leaf damage

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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