

# CUCUMBER BEETLE

**C**ucumber beetles are our most serious early-season pest in vine crops. They have yellow bodies, black heads, and come in striped and spotted varieties, so watch out for both on cucumber, squash, and melon plants. They mature to about 1/4 to 1/5 of an inch in length. Cucumber beetles spend the winter hiding in plant debris on the edge of gardens and fields. Upon warm weather and the emergence of their favorite culinary delights, they invade.

Cucumber beetles chew on flowers, foliage and rinds of ripening fruit. While plants are still young, this can cause delayed plant growth and reduced yield. However, the bigger concern is the transmission of disease to the plant because these diseases are typically more damaging than the beetles' munching. Cucumber beetles are known to transmit cucumber mosaic virus as well as bacteria that can cause the plant to wilt and die.

If you've noticed the Striped or Spotted Cucumber Beetle in your garden, there are a few strategies you can use to mitigate its effects and save your plants. You can hand-pick and kill the pest by hand-squishing or drowning them in soapy or salty water. You can also plant radishes as a "trap crop" near squashes and cucumbers to prevent damage. Preferring the radish greens, the beetles will generally munch on them before attacking squash and cucumbers, leaving your squash, cukes and the radish root relatively unscathed. Finally, if the cucumber beetle damage is done and your cucumbers, squashes, or melons are beyond saving, you may plant another round of crop later in the season for fall harvest.



*Clockwise from top: Striped Cucumber beetles in squash blossoms, Spotted Cucumber Beetle on sunflower.  
Photo credit: Jenn Forman Orth.*

## IN THE GP LENDING LIBRARY

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