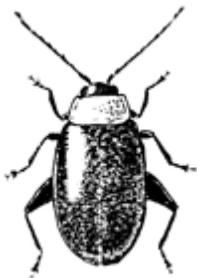


## Flea Beetles

(various species in the Family Chrysomelidae)

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Spinach  
flea beetle



Potato  
flea beetle



Leaf damage and beetles on a potato leaf.

Photo by Whitney Cranshaw, Colorado State University, [Bugwood.org](http://Bugwood.org)

### Injury

Adult flea beetles feed on the leaves of cabbage, tomato, tobacco, potato, cucumber, melon, grape, spinach, eggplant and related crops. In most cases different kinds of flea beetles attack only closely related plants, but some are general feeders.

The adults chew many holes in the leaves, and a heavily infested plant may look as if small shots had been fired into it. Feeding attacks occur at the cotyledon stage, seedling stage, and/or mature plant. The foliage may be so badly eaten on many garden plants that the plants die.

Larvae feed on the roots and tubers of host plants.

### Description

There are many species of flea beetles. A general description follows: the adult flea beetle is small -- 1/16 to 1/5 inch long, oval in shape, and it varies in color from blue-green to black, or may be striped or have other patterns on its wing covers. These small jumping beetles have the hind femora (top portion of hind leg) enlarged, enabling them to be powerful jumpers. The larvae are delicate, whitish, slender cylindrical worms, not over 1/3 inch long, with brownish heads and long legs. Many feed on rootlets underground and are seldom seen.

### Life History

After mating in the late spring, the female beetle enters the soil near the base of the food plant to lay her eggs. The eggs hatch in 5 to 8 days. The larvae feed on the roots for 2 to 3 weeks. Adults emerge and a second generation begins, sometimes even a third. The insects overwinter as adults in the soil and emerge again in May or June to begin feeding on the next season's crops.

## Management

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1. Keeping down weeds on which the flea beetles may live, in and around the garden, is one way to keep them in check.
2. Physical barriers such as row covers may help to protect plants from early damage. Row covers should be put in place when transplants are set or seeds are sown. Row covers should be removed before temperatures get too hot in mid-summer (often after 4 to 6 weeks).
3. On cabbage and related crucifers, the insecticide carbaryl is effective against these beetles. Other insecticides may be labeled for specific crops. Products registered for home garden use in New York State in 2009 include: insecticidal soap, kaolin clay (for suppression of flea beetle numbers), neem oil, and pyrethrins with canola oil. Before using any pesticide, be sure to *check the label* to see if the crop you want to treat and the pest you want to treat for are on the label. *If not, do not use the product.* Treatment should begin as soon as the first flea beetle appears. Be sure to follow manufacturers' directions when using any chemicals or pesticides. **REMEMBER -- KEEP CHEMICALS AND PESTICIDES OUT OF THE REACH OF CHILDREN AND PETS.**
4. When the weather is cool and beetles are less active, such as early morning, if flea beetles are on just a few garden plants, you may be able to brush them off the leaves into a large bowl or bucket containing water and a generous squirt of dish detergent, which prevents the beetles from floating or jumping out.

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**This publication contains pesticide recommendations. Changes in pesticide regulations occur constantly and human errors are still possible. Some materials mentioned may no longer be available and some uses may no longer be legal. All pesticides distributed, sold or applied in New York State must be registered with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). Questions concerning the legality and/or registration status for pesticide use in New York State should be directed to the appropriate Cornell Cooperative Extension Specialist or your regional DEC office. *READ THE LABEL BEFORE APPLYING ANY PESTICIDE.***