



Asparagus Beetle

K. A. Delahaut



Common asparagus beetle adult



Spotted asparagus beetle adult

The common (*Crioceris asparagi*) and spotted (*Crioceris duodecimpunctata*) asparagus beetles are annual pests of asparagus in Wisconsin. The common asparagus beetle is the most prevalent and the only one that causes economic damage to asparagus.

Appearance

The adult common asparagus beetle is bluish-brown with cream spots, while the spotted asparagus beetle is orange with black spots. Both are about 1/4 inch in size. Larvae of both resemble slugs and are cream-colored or gray with dark heads.

Symptoms and effects

Adults of the common asparagus beetle feed on the plant's spears and ferns. Disfigured and unmarketable spears can result when the beetles feed or lay eggs on the spears. Large populations of asparagus beetles, if left unchecked, can defoliate the plants.

Life cycle

Both the common and spotted asparagus beetles overwinter as adults in the soil or mulch. Adults can be active as soon as the host plants emerge in the spring. The spotted asparagus beetle becomes active later in the spring than the common asparagus beetle. The common asparagus beetle lays its eggs in rows on the emerging spears and ferns while the spotted asparagus beetle lays eggs only on the ferns. When the eggs hatch, the slug-like larvae migrate to the tips of the ferns where they begin feeding on the foliage. Spotted asparagus beetles feed only on the fruit produced and not on the ferns. Larval feeding continues for 10–14 days at which time the larvae migrate to the soil and pupate. Most larvae and adults are more active in the afternoon when the temperature and sunlight are at their peak.

Control

Scout plants in the afternoon when beetles are most active. Examine 100 crowns for the presence of beetles or eggs. Economic thresholds for plants scouted during the afternoon are indicated in the table that follows. If you sample during the morning hours you should drop your treatment threshold to account for the lower activity level of the beetles at this time of day. To achieve significant control, it's best to control adults early in the season before they lay eggs.

Destroying crop residues will eliminate overwintering sites for asparagus beetles. A tiny parasitic wasp (*Tetrastichus asparagi*) is an egg parasite of the common asparagus beetle and is capable of reducing the population by up to 70%. If insecticides are needed to reduce beetle populations below threshold levels, it is not necessary to treat the entire planting. Rather, you can spot treat those areas where threshold levels have been exceeded. New plantings tolerate less injury than established plantings.

For pesticide recommendations, refer to the UW-Extension publication *Commercial Vegetable Production in Wisconsin* (A3422).

When to control asparagus beetle

Life Stage	Threshold
Adults	5%–10% of plants infested
Eggs	2% of spears with eggs
Larvae	50%–75% of plants infested
Defoliation	10% of plants defoliated

Author: K. A. Delahaut is an outreach specialist with the Integrated Pest Management Program at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and the University of Wisconsin–Extension, Cooperative Extension.

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