

We are accustomed to dealing with the usual garden pests for our area, but during the last couple of years we have met a new enemy that is widespread across the country—the Japanese beetle.

It is a shame that such an attractive beetle is so destructive. They look like small pieces of copper jewelry—perhaps earrings or small brooches. But, what they are doing to our raspberry plants isn't so pretty.

So, I have been spending some time each day with a quart yogurt container half filled with water and a little soap. Although we see beetles occasionally on other plants, their attention to our fall raspberries is what I am combatting. They eat the green portion between the ribs on the leaves, and, so I have heard, also attack the fruit itself. So far, going over the berries twice a day, sweeping them from the bushes into the jar of soapy water, has kept them somewhat under control.

I read somewhere that Japanese beetles are “party animals,” and that where they are found, more will come. Some people put up traps for them at a distance from the plants they are harming. There is some controversy about this. Some say these pheromone traps catch a lot of beetles while others contend that they attract more than they capture, just directing the pests to the plants one is trying to protect.

I don't like to drown living creatures, even Japanese beetles, but they are sharp, unlike a Colorado potato beetle. So, I use the soapy water method, but every few minutes, I scoop them out on a hard surface and crush them with my foot. Potato bugs are easier to kill by just crushing them between my thumb and a finger.

In a way, picking any kind of harmful bugs from garden plants is rather interesting, and it is possible to turn it into a sport or contest of sorts if the damage isn't so extensive that one fears for the survival of the crop. Sometimes, I keep track of how many beetles or other insects I find on particular vegetables. I look for other insects that are seeming to prey on the pests. I wonder if certain plants have some sort of natural immunity that they remain insect free while their neighbors are eaten up.

I have seen only one tomato hornworm so far, and it was a tiny specimen. But, I am quite confident that they will soon appear in larger numbers and of more spectacular size. And looking for them is truly a sport. It is a little like Looking for Waldo. The damage they do is so apparent, and yet, they can hide in plain sight. That is the beauty and the danger of natural camouflage. And, tomato worms actually do some good at times, opening up the foliage so that they fruits more readily ripen. But, they can't leave well enough alone and soon begin eating green tomatoes, usually the ones that look most promising as we survey the coming harvest.

Still, I'd rather look for tomato worms or pick potato bugs than deal with these Japanese beetles. So, I will persevere with the jar of soapy water and an eagle eye.