



# Asparagus Beetle and Spotted Asparagus Beetle

Fact Sheet No. 75

Revised April 2000

Jay B Karren, Extension Entomologist

Alan H. Roe, Insect Diagnostician

Two species of old world Chrysomolidae attack asparagus wherever it is found. They have slightly different life histories and habits and are very easy to identify. They are found exclusively on asparagus. Adults overwinter in sheltered areas and surface debris in and around the asparagus plants.

## Asparagus Beetle

The asparagus beetle was first found injuring asparagus in New York in 1862. The adult is approximately 1/4 inch (7mm) long, brightly blue-black in color with a reddish head and thorax (neck-like area behind the head) and edges of wing covers. Each wing cover is marked with three yellowish square or rectangular spots. Adults begin feeding on asparagus shoots as soon as they break through the soil surface in the early spring. The dark elongated eggs are cemented individually on end on the asparagus spears and hatch in about a week. The larvae are soft and wrinkled and dark olive green with a black head and legs. They crawl to the tips and feed on the surface of the spears and on the leaves for about two weeks, growing to a length of 1/3 inch before entering the soil to form yellowish pupae. The new adults emerge within two weeks to start the next generation.

## Spotted Asparagus Beetle

The spotted asparagus beetle is tan to reddish orange with six black spots on each wing cover and is similar in size to the asparagus beetle described above. It appears on the asparagus plant a little later in the year and deposits its eggs shortly before berries form. The greenish eggs are glued singly, on their sides to the leaves and hatch in one to two weeks. Each orange larva bores into and consumes three to four berries before pupating in the soil. New adults appear in July to start a second generation each year. In both species, cold temperature kills the late season eggs and larvae and prompts adult beetles to move to overwintering sites.

## Damage

Beetles of both species mainly cause damage to the growing shoots of the asparagus by

scaring the spears and stems and consume the leaves. Eggs are difficult to remove and render the spears unfit for sale. Asparagus beetle larvae deposit a dark excrement on the spears. Spotted asparagus beetle larvae consume asparagus berries but cause essentially no damage to leaves or spears.

## **Control**

Threshold for both species are very low because even slight damage to the spears can be inflicted within a day or two of emergence making them undesirable and a poor market product. Applications of insecticide (dust or sprays) are often required to reduce this damage. Beetles will also feed on ferns later in the season, robbing plants of photosynthetic capabilities for storing food. Some insecticide control may be necessary to protect ferns from this defoliation.

For homeowner use, formulations of carbaryl, chlorpyrifos, cube resins, diatomaceous earth, methoxychlor, malathion, permethrin, pyrethrins, and rotenone are registered for control of asparagus beetle on asparagus. Agricultural-type products include formulations of carbaryl, chlorpyrifos, dimethoate, malathion, methomyl, methoxychlor, permethrin, and pyrethrins. Before purchasing or applying any product for this purpose, check the label to be sure asparagus is listed.

In small patches, spotted asparagus beetles may be significantly reduced by gathering and destroying berries before larvae complete their development. This method is very time consuming and most gardeners prefer to control the beetles with insecticides.

## **Precautionary Statement**

All pesticides have both benefits and risks. Benefits can be maximized and risks minimized by reading and following the labeling. Pay close attention to the directions for use and the precautionary statements. The information on pesticide labels contains both instructions and limitations. Pesticide labels are legal documents, and it is a violation of both federal and state laws to use a pesticide inconsistent with its labeling. The pesticide applicator is legally responsible for proper use. Always read and follow the label.

[HOME](#)[Faculty / Staff](#)[Biology](#)[IPM](#)[Extension](#)[USU](#)