

Red Lily Leaf Beetle – IT SQUEAKS!

By Linda K. Schneider

Calls are coming in to report the red lily leaf beetle as it munches its way from Windsor to Chester. Have you seen them? A new invasive species of insect has just arrived to Central and Southern Vermont! In 2002, there were reported sightings in Northern Vermont. They crossed the border from Montreal, Canada, probably hidden in the foliage of a potted plant. They are native to Europe.

Oriental lilies have a huge popularity with home gardeners, florists, and commercial growers. Their showy beauty and the ease in which they grow have established them as favorites. Just a few lilies can add a striking show in a floral arrangement. Lilies have been mostly disease and insect resistant, until now.

These UGLY little critters are arriving in great numbers. All three stages seem to be here at the same time; eggs, larva and adult beetles. Voracious eaters! They seem to eat the entire plant; leaves, flowers, stem and all! One minute the plant is fine, the next time you look, it is destroyed! Lilies and Fritillarias are the true host plants, where it lays its eggs and develops. *Liliuim* species; Turk's cap lilies, tiger lilies, Easter lilies, Asiatic and Oriental lilies. They may eat other plants such as; Solomon's seal, potato, bittersweet nightshade and Nicotiana.

This variety of beetle uses two survival techniques. The first is in the larva stage; it has the nasty habit of spreading its own dung on its back to resemble bird droppings as camouflage. The second is in the adult beetle stage; pick it up, squeeze it gently and it squeaks! The beetle is hoping to be quickly dropped. This is a defense mechanism to warn off predators.

The beetle hides well in the lily foliage, remember that is how it got here! However, its brilliant color does seem to give it away. The adult has a bright scarlet body with black head, legs and underbelly. Look for the reddish-orange eggs on the underside of leaves. Larva enters the soil to pupate; pupa stage is florescent orange. This shouldn't be too hard to find.

How do we control this new invasive insect? If you only have a few oriental lilies, patrol for eggs and adults. Hand-pick them and drop them in warm soapy water. This method can be very effective. However, no one seems to want to touch the ugly larva stage!

Try neem, with repeated applications, it has been reported to work well. Neem is an insecticide based upon extracts from the neem tree. Find it at your local garden supply stores under many trade names: Turplex, AzatinEC, Margosan-O, Align and BioNeem. Neem kills larva and repels adults. After the eggs hatch, apply neem once per week.

Other insecticides provide effective control; however, you won't hear me promoting anything that isn't natural. Why add more chemicals to our already injured environment, when natural alternatives are on the market and they work!

Parasitic wasps have been used to control the lily leaf beetle in France and Switzerland, with great success.

Currently studies are being done in both USA and UK, to lead to better understanding of the beetle's biology and improved methods for its control.

Be a responsible gardener. Make every attempt to not transport these insects.

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