

UNH Cooperative Extension Info Line Question of the Week

ROSE CHAFER

Q: Several plants in my yard are being devoured by an olive/tan-colored beetle. I've seen it on my roses, as well as several trees and perennials, making the leaves unsightly. What is it and what can I do to protect my plants?

A: This common olive- or tan-colored beetle that suddenly appears in early summer is the rose chafer. It has a dark orange head, thorax and legs. It is prevalent in areas with sandy soil. Adult females lay their eggs in weeds and turf during spring and early summer. Their larvae feed on grass and other plant roots (causing no damage to lawns or landscape plants), spend the winter below the frost line, and pupate in the spring. The adults emerge in late May. Rose chafers eagerly devour almost any tree and ornamental, but damage is generally only cosmetic. The feeding frenzy begins in June and lasts about three weeks. Fortunately, New Hampshire has only one generation per year.

Hand picking provides the best control. Planting trap crops such as blackberries, white roses, or spirea may help by providing a target for large numbers of beetles. Consider covering your most valued plants with cheesecloth or polyester row covers while the adults are actively feeding. Pesticides are ineffective in most cases, because the insects fly long distances in search of food and newcomers will quickly replace those initially poisoned and killed.

If you do choose to use pesticide sprays or dusts, follow the product's label directions carefully. Most effective products are also highly toxic to honeybees, so don't apply pesticides during the daytime hours when bees are visiting flowers.

Got questions? UNH Cooperative Extension Education Center's Info Line offers practical help finding answers for your lawn and garden questions. Call toll free at 1-877-398-4769, M-F, 9:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m., or e-mail us at answers@unh.edu.