

August 12, 2015



Yikes -- Bugs in my Squash!
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It's been a long hard week at work... at home, you meander out into the garden. Strolling along you admire all the plants, a testimony to your hard work. Suddenly you notice a sickly plant, and are drawn to the squash with the yellow wilting leaves. Concerned, you stoop to examine it and two large 'bugs' appear to be mating on the leaves. What! Their carefree attitude infuriates you, and you rush to the shed where you arm yourself with a sprayer filled with insecticide ready to eradicate the problem. But you should stop and ask yourself: what am I spraying, and why?

Did this work last time? Didn't the squash plant die even after you sprayed it? Aren't these same bugs back? Do you want to use chemical sprays again? And the best question of all to ask: what is this 'bug'?

When most bugs or insects are discovered, they are already adults and they are rarely alone. Finding insects on a particular plant is a clue because specific plants attract specific insects. What are other clues to identify? Insects come in family groups defined by their body parts. So consider size, wings present or not, and how many sets of wings. Is there a long probus, a straw like structure for sucking, or chewing mouth parts? Because the insect kingdom has large populations, identification is challenging.

The squash bug is an insect named *Anasa tristis*. Careful examination reveals its personal characteristics: flat, five-eighths of an inch long, grayish brown color, and piercing sucking mouth part. Carefully lift the leaf and discover very minute copper red eggs or nymphs in colors of green to gray. In this particular insect, the eggs hatch in one to two weeks and then pass through five different nymph stages over four to six weeks until the adult stage. These insects feed and mate on the same plant. The affected plant, zucchini, develops yellowing, wilting leaves, because this insect sucks on them and disrupts the normal flow of water and nutrients.

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There are several insects that infest squash but only one, the squash bug *Anasa tristis*, has these characteristics. Correct identification leads to correct treatment, so get the facts and use information provided by experts who study insects.

To manage the squash bug, begin before the insect grows into an adult. Before planting check all new seedlings for eggs found on the underside of the leaves. In early spring, remove old mulch from your planting beds, because the adults live there in winter. Check the leaves regularly especially at flowering time for eggs; destroying eggs will limit the quantity of insects that grow into reproductive adults. Trap adult insects by placing rolled newspapers at the plant base, and then carefully throw out the newspapers with the trapped bugs. Another method is to simply remove adults by hand and put them into soapy water to kill them. Remove any poorly-established squash plants, because plants with poor vigor attract damaging insects. Because insecticides do not control this particular insect, it is not advised to use them. Here are some helpful links:

<http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn74144.html>

<http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/GARDEN/VEGES/squash.html>

<http://www.vegedge.umn.edu/VEGPEST/CUCS/squabug.htm>

http://www.clemson.edu/extension/hgic/pests/plant_pests/veg_fruit/hgic2207.html

Today, August 12th from 9:00 a.m. to noon at Cameron Park Community Center, 2502 Country Club Drive, Cameron Park is a free UCCE Master Gardener and Master Food Preserver fun class on Tons of Tomatoes and Zillions of Zucchini. Learn how to easily plant, harvest, store and preserve those tomatoes and zucchini. This class will also be presented this Saturday, August 15th from 9:00 a.m. to noon at the Veterans Memorial Building, 130 Placerville Drive, Placerville.

UCCE Master Gardeners are available to answer your questions at local farmers markets and in their office every Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome at the office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities throughout the county, go to our Master Gardener website at <http://ucanr.edu/edmg>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter. You can also find us on Facebook.