

My drip tape system in the garden seems to have something chewing on the tape. I thought maybe it was ground squirrels, but instead all I find is a pretty big bug with long hind legs and a bald head. What is this thing and is it possible for it to chew through drip tape?

The description you give fits that of the Jerusalem cricket (see photo). Jerusalem crickets are usually around two inches long, have a large brown head and a brown, striped abdomen. Because of their large size and unusual appearance, people tend to be frightened of them, but they are not dangerous.

Because Jerusalem crickets are burrowing insects and have powerful forelegs and jaws, it is possible for Jerusalem crickets to chew through drip tape, and the situation you describe is not unusual. It appears that this damage occurs when soil starts to dry in the spring and this insect starts to look for other sources of water. However, outside of the occasional damage to drip tape, Jerusalem crickets should not be considered a pest of plants. They feed mainly on decomposing organic matter in the soil.

Since the Jerusalem cricket is a very large insect, attempting to control it with insecticides is not a good decision. The best approach for those who wish to control them is to crush them when they are found. Jerusalem crickets are not found in great abundance in any one place, so the removal of a few individuals will likely result in a reduction of the population of that area.

Furthermore, since Jerusalem crickets are not really a garden pest other than the damage to the drip tape, growers and gardeners who find them to be a continuous problem should consider using a heavier gauge tape. Experience indicates that heavier drip tapes resist damage from Jerusalem crickets.

The above has been a brief guide to managing Jerusalem crickets in gardens and fields. Please contact Mark Bolda at UCCE Santa Cruz if you have more questions on this topic or any other topics concerning blackberry, raspberry or strawberry production.



Jerusalem cricket, *Stenopelmatus fuscus*