

Asparagus Beetle

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The common (*Criocercis asparagi*) and spotted (*Crioceris duodecimpunctata*) asparagus beetles are annual pests of asparagus in Wisconsin. The common asparagus beetle is the more prevalent of the two and the only one that causes economic damage to asparagus.

Appearance The adult common asparagus beetle is bluish-brown with cream spots while the spotted asparagus beetle is orange with black spots. Both are about ¼ inch in size. Larvae of both are slug-like and cream-colored or grey with dark heads.



Common asparagus beetle adult



Spotted asparagus beetle adult

Symptoms and Effects Adults of the common asparagus beetle feed on the spears and ferns. Spear feeding disfigures them, rendering them unmarketable. Eggs laid on the spears also makes them unmarketable. Defoliation of plants can occur if large populations are left unchecked.

Life Cycle Both the common and spotted asparagus beetles overwinter as adults in the soil or mulch. Adults can be active as soon as the host plants emerge in the spring. The spotted asparagus beetle becomes active later in the spring than the common asparagus beetle. Eggs of the common asparagus beetle are laid in rows on the emerging spears and ferns while the spotted asparagus beetle only lays eggs on the ferns. When the eggs hatch, the slug-like larvae migrate to the tips of the ferns where they begin feeding on the foliage. Spotted asparagus beetles feed only on the fruit produced and not on the ferns. Larval feeding continues for 10-14 days at which time, they migrate to the soil and pupate. Most larvae and adults are more active in the afternoon when the temperature and sunlight are greatest.



Control Scout plants in the afternoon when beetles are most active. Examine 100 crowns for the presence of beetles or eggs. Economic thresholds for plants scouted during the afternoon are indicated in the table below. If you sample during the morning hours you should drop your treatment threshold to account for the lower activity level of the beetles at this time of day. To achieve significant control, it's best to control adults early in the season before eggs are laid.

Life Stage	Threshold
Adults	5-10% of plants infested
Eggs	2% of spears with eggs
Larvae	50-75% of plants infested
Defoliation	10% of plants defoliated

Destruction of crop residues will eliminate overwintering sites for the beetles. There is a tiny parasitic wasp (*Tetrastichus asparagi*) that is an egg parasite of the common asparagus beetle that is capable of reducing the population by up to 70%. If insecticides are needed to reduce beetle populations below threshold levels, spot treat threshold levels have been exceeded. New plantings tolerate less injury.

For pesticide recommendations: See UW-Extension Bulletin A3422 or contact your County Extension Agent.

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