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Problem: Cucumber Beetles - *Acalymma vittatum*

Hosts: Primarily cucumber, cantaloupe, squash, pumpkin, gourd, and watermelon but may also feed on beans, corn, potatoes and other crops.

Description:

Striped Cucumber Beetles are insects with chewing mouthparts. Having overwintered under debris in and around fields, adult beetles appear early in the season often feeding on various alternate host plants. Eventually, beetles are attracted to newly seeded fields. Beetles may burrow into the soil and destroy plants before they break the surface. Beetles also feed on and kill newly emerged seedlings.

The 1/4 inch long cucumber beetles are conspicuously colored: black head and antennae, straw yellow thorax and yellowish wing covers with 3 distinct parallel and longitudinal black stripes. Beetles deposit their eggs in the soil around the bases of host plants. While root feeding by many beetle larvae may cause plants to be stunted, larval feeding is generally of little concern. Feeding stops when larvae pupate.

Newly emerged first generation beetles (mid-July to early August) are of lesser concern because by this time, most plants are of sufficient size to tolerate feeding. A second generation of striped cucumber beetles is produced in pumpkin fields, as well as on various alternate hosts including goldenrod, sunflowers, and various ornamentals, such as asters. Second generation adults emerge late in the season and feed until they are forced into hibernation.

These insects also carry bacterial wilt. This disease is carried from plant to plant as the cucumbers feed. Affected plants wilt and eventually die.

Recommendations:

Cucumber beetles are difficult to control because adults attack plants so close to or even below ground level. Young plants can be protected by use of row covers, cones, or other types of mechanical barriers. Edges must be sealed to insure that the beetles do not find a place of entry. Plants will eventually outgrow these barriers or they will need to be removed to allow insect pollination of the flowers.

Suggested insecticides include Rotenone, permethrin (numerous trade names) and methoxychlor. If insecticides are used, be sure to spray or dust weekly from the time the beetles appear until the end of the growing season.

References:

1. Striped Cucumber Beetle, Cornell Cooperative Extension Service

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