

Bluestem Breezes
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Grasshoppers

In general, I like to keep my mood positive. I work to spend time on things I generally enjoy. While the basis of many of these columns is typically a downfall, issue, or hurdle, there is normally a practical way to fix it (avoid it, overhaul it, prevent it, etc.); that ‘fixing’ is my attempt to help you also remain positive.

Now that we have some general standards set for this column, I can assure you this week shall be a rarity. If there is a topic area to roll your eyes about, let it be grasshoppers (and bindweed should be thrown in that category also).

This year especially, it seems that you are either overrun by grasshoppers or you haven’t seen or heard from them all summer. Want to guess which category I fall into? That’s right – overrun.

I fondly write about my time spent in the vegetable garden and flower beds. But, this year, it is so very disheartening to walk outside and be pounced upon by a cloud of grasshoppers.

Recently, I stood in my driveway and gazed into my garden, daydreaming of the flourishing plants and vines I intended to grow this year. What I truly viewed was grasshopper adorned plants and vines. Ok, so I turned around 180 degrees and looked at a flower bed across the driveway. It’s barely been touched by the grasshopper posse. Can you believe it?!? And, this is when I threw up my hands and walked straight back to the house! I wish I could lure all of the grasshoppers thriving in my nice flower beds, in the yard, and especially in my garden, in to this one flower bed that means the least to me. They know, I know they do.

Ok, so enough of this pessimism. What’s the fix for our grasshopper foes (other than staying indoors until the first hard freeze)? Persistence is key, followed closely behind by products labeled for grasshopper control.

Here are tips from K-State Specialist Ward Upham:

Permethrin (numerous trade names) is a good choice for vegetable crops because it is labeled for a wide variety of vegetables.

Grasshoppers can reinfest an area relatively quickly. Your chemical of choice may not be failing you; it may be the latest crop of hoppers moving in! Yes, there are multiple waves of grasshoppers coming in throughout the summer. This is not a one-time deal folks.

Carbaryl (Sevin) can also be used for grasshopper control but can lead to mite outbreaks as it is very toxic to mite predators.

We often have gardeners who are interested in organic controls. *Nosema locustae*, a protozoan, is the active ingredient in a number of products including Semaspore, NOLO Bait, HopperStopper and Grasshopper Attack. These are selective, organic products.

Nosema locustae products may not be as effective in garden situations as they would be under large-scale rangeland conditions due to potential reinfestations from outside the treated area. Also, these products have other potential disadvantages:

- They are most effective against nymphal rather than adult grasshoppers. Also some grasshopper species are less susceptible than others.
- Kill can take 3 to 6 weeks after ingestion.
- These baits are perishable and should be kept refrigerated until use.

Pay attention to the expiration date. As mentioned above, reinfestations of uninfected grasshoppers can occur. These products are not effective against adults. Try to treat the nesting area when hoppers are small and populations are concentrated.

Poultry including turkeys, guinea hens and chickens have also been used to help control grasshoppers.

Regardless of method used, the trick is to treat early before the population has matured. Young nymphal stages are much easier to control than adults and are also much less mobile.

Direct contact with insecticides is essential to grasshopper control. Application effectiveness may be increased if made when grasshoppers are less active; they are less active during the night's cooler temperatures.

For additional information on controlling grasshoppers, stop by the Extension Office (215 Kansas, Courthouse, Alma; kamayer@ksu.edu; 765-3821). For Bluestem Breezes archives, check out wabaunsee.ksu.edu.