



Lily Leaf Beetle

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Lily beetles are in Peterborough

There is a little red beetle that is turning your lilies into its own personal smorgasbord.

What they look like

This bright red beetle looks like a stretch limo ladybug, about 8 mm long, without any spots. It has black legs and antennae. Its young are disgusting because they live under the leaves and keep their black gooey excrement on their backs while chewing the leaves. Their eggs are reddish brown lines of spots on the underside of the leaves.

What they like to eat

They eat true lilies which look like the familiar Easter Lily and come in many colours including red, orange, yellow, pink and white. They are all beautiful, and if you plant several varieties, you can have lilies through a good part of the summer. There are a number of wonderful types. There are the earlier flowering asiatic lilies, oriental lilies, and the tall often fragrant trumpet lilies.

Lily beetles will also eat the beautiful plant fritillaria. They do not attack daylilies.

Controlling the beetles

In the early spring when you get the odd warm day, look for the red adult beetle, particularly where you grow lilies but also in other areas. The adults that have made it through the winter start crawling around the dead leaves and mulch in your garden. If you find them, squish them with your fingers. They sometimes give a little squeak when you catch them but ignore this and eliminate this nasty little critter. For every one you catch at this time of year, you have removed hundreds of their potential offspring that would munch on your lilies later in the summer. If you don't want to get your hands messed up, then drop them into soapy water. Once the lilies start growing, they will be found mostly on the leaves but sometimes on other plants in the area, and you need to patrol almost daily for them. Once the population gets out of control, it's hard to stop it. Spraying has only limited effect on them because you have to actually get the spray on the beetle. Here is a hint about stalking the adults – when your shadow goes over them, they have a tendency to drop to the ground as a defense mechanism.

It was once thought that a product called Neem oil when sprayed on the leaves made the leaves unpalatable to the beetles, but this is not proven and is unlikely. Neem oil will eventually kill the insects if you get it on them but this would probably not work any better than a diluted dish soap solution. Now for the really disgusting part of the task - the young larvae are found under the leaves wallowing in their own black excrement. If you have a strong constitution, you can pick them off, but you might prefer to consider the leaf as a write off and pick it off and step on it.

The lily beetle is thought to have been imported on lilies from other locations so it's best not to share your lilies with people that don't have lily beetle.