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A Weekly Column from Iowa State University Extension and Outreach

Week of August 21, 2017
For Immediate Release

I Spy with My Little Eye...

Margaret Murphy, Horticulture Educator and Regional Food Coordinator

I spy with my little eye...soldier beetles in the garden.

There is a wonderful garden at the Lyon County Fairgrounds in Rock Rapids. Together with vegetables, it is peppered with an assortment of annual and perennial flowers. In the area that is the children's garden, the kids planted a wide swath of some of the most beautiful zinnias I've ever seen. As I wandered through the garden the other day, I couldn't help but notice how alive it was with the movement and sounds of insects. One insect in particular caught my attention because it just recently showed up in very noticeable numbers – the soldier beetle.

In Iowa, we usually see the goldenrod soldier beetle, *Chauliognathus pennsylvanicus*, also called the Pennsylvania Leatherwing. The nickname "leatherwing" comes from the soft, leathery texture of its wing covers.

The adult goldenrod soldier beetle is dark yellow in color and reaches about ½ -inch in length. It sports a black head with a black spot behind the head. It also has a black, oval-shaped spot on each wing cover. August and September is when the adult is active.



Some gardeners may become concerned when they see a large number of beetles landing in their garden but the soldier beetle is not an insect to worry about. In fact, it's considered beneficial.

As larvae, the soldier beetle is found in moist soil or plant debris and feeds on other insects including the eggs and larvae of some garden pests. The adult may feed on aphids and other soft-bodied insects but mainly forages on flower nectar and pollen. It can often be seen flying from flower to flower and because of its frequent contact with flowers is a valuable pollinator. This time of year, flowers also serve as a place for it to find romance with another.

The soldier beetle protects itself by secreting an offensive chemical to make it seem less tasty to a would-be predator. Its yellow color may also be a signal to predators that it doesn't taste very good.

Since soldier beetles are beneficial and harmless, it is unnecessary to control them. If they accidentally make it inside the house, just help them back outside.

If you are unsure of the identity of a bug in your garden, snap a picture and send it to your local ISU Extension and Outreach office. We'll be happy to help identify it for you.

- 30 -

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