

The Green Scene

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Squash Bug

Description of squash bugs

The squash bug is distributed throughout the U.S. and is a well-known pest. It attacks all cucurbits and vine crops but is most damaging to squashes and pumpkins. The insect has a disagreeable odor when crushed and is one of many insects known by the nickname "stink bug." The squash bug adult is 1-inch long, gray-black or brown in color, elongate oval and pointed at the head end. They spend the winter in dormancy in protected locations such as among old vines, under leaves, clods, stones and other debris.

Life cycle of squash bugs

Adults appear on pumpkins and squash when the vines start to run. They may be difficult to see because their color matches the soil and because they are usually hiding under the vines, leaves or clods of dirt. The adults feed on sap from the plant leaves as they lay clusters of a dozen or more, large, brick-red to yellow-brown eggs on the lower sides of the leaves, usually in the angle formed by the leaf veins, or on the stems. Eggs are laid until about mid-summer.

Squash bug nymphs are green when they first emerge from the eggs. They remain in clusters for the first several days. They feed on sap from the plants and grow for a period of 4 to 6 weeks before they reach maturity. Medium to large sized nymphs change to gray or grayish-white color. New adults appear by the end of the summer and may feed on the rinds of unripe fruit before moving to protected locations where they spend the winter. There is only 1 generation per year. Heavy squash bug infestations cause a rapid wilting of the plant. Heavily injured leaves become characteristically blackened and crisp as they die. Small plants may be entirely killed early in the growing season. Larger plants may have isolated damage on certain leaves or runners.

Management of squash bugs

Squash bug populations vary greatly from year to year. Begin checking for eggs and small nymphs during late June. Handpick and discard egg clusters and nymphs as they appear. Use garden insecticides such as Sevin, permethrin or insecticidal soap according to label directions. Sprays are generally more effective than dusts, but must be reapplied frequently. Avoid spraying plants in bloom. If spraying during bloom is necessary, spray at night after honey bees have quit foraging for the day. Remove crop residues in the fall to reduce the number of squash bugs that survive the winter.

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Harvesting and Drying Herbs

By Richard Jauron

Most herbs can be cut and used throughout the growing season. They can also be harvested, dried, and stored for use during the winter months.

Many herbs, such as sage, rosemary, and basil, are grown for their leaves. These herbs should be harvested when their flower buds are just beginning to open. The oils in the leaves which give each herb its distinctive flavor and aroma are at their maximum levels at this stage of growth. Remove approximately 1/3 of the current year's growth on perennial herbs. Annual herbs can be cut back more severely. Make the cuts on annuals approximately 4 to 6 inches above the soil surface. The annuals can be cut at ground level when harvesting in the fall before the first frost. Most annual and perennial herbs can be harvested in mid-summer and again in the fall.

Herbs should be harvested in the early morning, after the dew has evaporated but before the sun becomes hot. After harvesting, rinse herbs in cool water. Shake off excess water and place them on paper toweling to dry for a few minutes.

Air drying is the most popular method to dry herbs. To dry whole branches or stems, gather 8 to 12 stems in a bunch. Tie the ends of the stems together and hang each bunch upside down in a warm (70 to 80 F), dark, well ventilated location. The herbs should be dry in 2 to 4 weeks. When thoroughly dry, strip the leaves from the plants. Crush or crumble the leaves and store in airtight jars in a cool, dry place.

Another way to dry herbs is to place them on a drying tray. A simple drying tray consists of fine mesh screen or cheesecloth attached to a wooden frame. A small window screen also works well. Place wooden blocks under the corners of the drying tray to insure good air circulation. Place a single layer of leaves or stems on the drying surface and keep the herbs in a warm, dry area until they are thoroughly dry.

A gas or electric oven can also be used to dry herbs. To oven dry, spread a layer of leaves or stems on a cookie sheet or shallow baking pan. Place the herbs in a warm (up to 180 F) oven for 3 to 4 hours. Leave the oven door open and stir the herbs periodically until they are thoroughly dry.

Some herbs, such as dill, caraway, and coriander, are valued for their seeds. Harvest the seedheads just before they turn brown. Cut off the entire seedhead and place it in a paper bag. Then place the bags in a warm, dry location. After drying, shake the seeds loose in the bag. Remove any chaff by pouring the seeds from one container to another outdoors in a light wind. Additional information on harvesting and storing herbs can be found in Pm 1239 "Growing and Drying Herbs."



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