

The Dark Side of Gardening: 14 Common Mistakes That Can Ruin Your Garden



Gardening is a beloved hobby for many, offering a sense of peace, accomplishment, and connection to nature. However, even the most well-intentioned gardener can fall prey to common mistakes that have the potential to turn this rewarding activity into a source of frustration. Understanding these pitfalls is crucial to maintaining a healthy, vibrant garden. This article sheds light on 14 common gardening mistakes, providing insights into how to avoid them and ensure your garden thrives.

1. Overwatering: The Silent Killer



One of the most frequent errors in gardening is overwatering. While plants certainly need water to survive, too much can lead to root rot, a condition where roots can't breathe and effectively absorb nutrients. This mistake often stems from a well-meaning desire to care for plants, but it's crucial to understand that different plants have varied water needs. Overwatered soil can also become a breeding ground for fungi and pests, further harming your plants. Learning to check soil moisture before watering and investing in a simple irrigation system can prevent this common issue.

2. Neglecting Soil Health



Soil is the foundation of any garden, and neglecting its health can lead to numerous problems. Many gardeners make the mistake of planting without first testing and amending their soil. Poor soil can be too acidic, too alkaline, nutrient-deficient, or lack proper drainage, all of which can stunt plant growth. Incorporating organic matter, such as compost or well-rotted manure, can vastly improve soil structure and fertility, leading to healthier plants.

3. Planting at the Wrong Time



Timing is everything in gardening, and planting too early or too late in the season can doom plants from the start. Frost can kill tender seedlings, while heat stress can affect those planted too late. Understanding the growing season in your region and the specific needs of each plant is essential. Utilize local planting guides and be mindful of last frost dates to ensure your plants get the best start possible.

4. Ignoring Pest and Disease Management



Pests and diseases can wreak havoc in a garden, and failing to manage them proactively can lead to significant losses. Regular monitoring of plants for signs of trouble, such as discolored leaves, holes, or wilting, is vital. Natural pest control methods – like introducing beneficial insects and practicing crop rotation – can help manage these issues without resorting to harsh chemicals that can harm the ecosystem.

5. Overcrowding Plants



Overcrowding is a common mistake that not only stunts plant growth due to competition for light, water, and nutrients but also increases the likelihood of disease. Proper spacing allows for adequate air circulation, which is essential in preventing fungal infections. Always follow the spacing recommendations for each plant, and be prepared to thin seedlings when necessary to give each plant enough room to grow.

6. Using Chemicals Recklessly



The misuse of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides can not only harm your plants but also negatively impact soil health and local wildlife. Organic gardening practices are not only better for the environment but can also lead to a more resilient garden. If chemicals must be used, always follow the instructions carefully and consider the potential impact on beneficial organisms.

7. Choosing the Wrong Plants



Not all plants are suited to all environments, and choosing plants that are not compatible with your garden's conditions can lead to disappointment. Consider factors such as sunlight, soil type, and climate when selecting plants. Native plants are often a good choice, as they are adapted to local conditions and require less maintenance.

8. Ignoring Companion Planting



Companion planting involves placing plants together that benefit and support each other, either by deterring pests, improving growth, or enhancing flavor. Ignoring these beneficial relationships can result in a less productive and more pest-prone garden. Researching and implementing companion planting strategies can lead to a healthier, more harmonious garden ecosystem.

9. Forgetting to Mulch



Mulch is not just an aesthetic addition to the garden; it plays a crucial role in retaining soil moisture, regulating temperature, and suppressing weeds. Forgetting to mulch can lead to dry, hard soil and a weed infestation, both of which can stress plants. A layer of organic mulch, such as straw or bark, can make a significant difference in the health of your garden.

10. Improper Pruning



Pruning is essential for the health and productivity of many plants, but doing it incorrectly or at the wrong time can lead to poor growth or even kill a plant. Each plant has specific pruning needs, and understanding these is key to encouraging healthy growth and flowering. Avoid heavy pruning outside of the recommended periods, and always use clean, sharp tools to make precise cuts.

11. Lack of Planning



A well-planned garden is more likely to succeed than one thrown together haphazardly. Lack of planning can lead to issues like poor plant placement, inadequate space for growth, and an unbalanced design. Taking the time to sketch out your garden layout and consider the needs of each plant can save time and resources in the long run.

12. Ignoring Vertical Space



Many gardeners forget to utilize vertical space, which can significantly increase your growing area, especially in small gardens. Trellises, climbing plants, and vertical planters can add depth and interest to your garden while maximizing space.

13. Watering Inconsistently



Inconsistent watering can stress plants, leading to poor growth and susceptibility to disease. Establishing a regular watering schedule that accounts for the needs of your plants and the local climate can ensure your garden remains healthy and vibrant.

14. Failing to Adapt



Finally, one of the biggest mistakes gardeners can make is failing to learn from their experiences and adapt their practices. Gardening is a continual learning process, and what works one year may not work the next. Being open to changing your methods and trying new approaches is essential for long-term gardening success.

Don't Let Common Mistakes Stop You!



Gardening is a journey filled with learning and discovery, and mistakes are all part of the process. By being aware of these common pitfalls and taking steps to avoid them, you can ensure your garden remains a source of joy and beauty. Remember, every mistake is an opportunity to grow, both as a gardener and in your garden.

Top 9 Common Plant Pests and How To Control Them



I have a friend who has a pest guy. She calls this guy every time that she finds a bug. Naturally, he's very helpful. However, hiring a pest control agency can be quite pricy. Therefore, it would be helpful for her to identify the most common plant pests and how to control them. In fact, it's good advice for all of us.

Top 9 Common Plant Pests and How To Control Them

Notably, the most common plant pests can vary from region to region. This depends on a variety of factors, including:

- climate
- growing conditions

- types of plants grown in a given area
- impact of agriculture, urbanization and international trade on an area

For example, in regions with warm and humid climates, pests such as spider mites and thrips may be more common. In contrast, pests such as scale insects and mealybugs may be more prevalent in colder regions.

Regardless of the region, however, some pests are more commonly encountered than others. Aphids and whiteflies are good examples. As such, it is important for indoor and outdoor growers alike to be aware of common plant pests and how to control them.

So, with that in mind, here are the nine most common plant pests and how to control them. I've tried to include the most effective ways to control them as well as some of the most inexpensive options.

Aphids

Aphids are tiny insects that suck the sap from plant leaves. This causes the leaves to wilt and yellow. That is one of the most obvious signs that you might have aphids.

A simple and inexpensive way to control aphids is to make a DIY insecticidal soap using a mixture of water and dish soap. Alternatively, you can actually just use a strong stream of water to knock them off the plant when you see them.

Spider Mites

Spider mites are tiny arachnids that also suck the sap from plant leaves.

A simple and inexpensive way to control spider mites is to regularly mist your plants with water to increase humidity, which can deter spider mites.

You can also use the same DIY insecticidal soap recommended for aphids to control spider mites.

Whiteflies

Whiteflies are small, flying insects that are bad for many plants.

To control whiteflies, you can use that same insecticidal soap. You can also use neem oil for these or the aforementioned posts.

However, you might want to try stick traps for flying pests like whiteflies. You can make a cheap sticky trap using yellow index cards coated with petroleum jelly. Place around your plants and catch those whiteflies.

Mealybugs

Mealybugs are soft-bodied insects that produce a white, waxy substance that protects them from predators. They, in turn, come after your plants.

An inexpensive way to control mealybugs is to dip a cotton swab in rubbing alcohol and use it to wipe off the bugs. This will kill them.

Scale Insects

Scale insects are small, flat insects that attach themselves to plant leaves and stems.

Like with aphids, you can use insecticidal soap, neem oil, or a strong stream of water to knock them off of your plants. In fact, keep this tip in your back pocket as a go to for the most common plant pests and how to control them.

You might also control scale insects by using a toothbrush or cotton swab dipped in rubbing alcohol to remove them from your

plants.

Thrips

Thrips are tiny insects that feed on plant leaves, causing them to turn silver or bronze. If you see your plant leaves turning these unusual colors, then you should suspect thrips. They also spread plant diseases. Therefore, you want to get them under control quickly.

To control thrips, you can use insecticidal soap, neem oil, or sticky traps to catch them.

Fungus Gnats

Fungus gnats are small flying insects that feed on plant roots and can cause root damage and plant wilting.

To control fungus gnats, you can use sticky traps. Alternatively, you might want to try using nematodes. These are microscopic worms that feed on fungus gnat larvae. Although they aren't useful for all of the most common pests and how to control them, they're great for this particular pest.

Another option is to let the soil dry out between watering, as fungus gnats prefer moist soil. Of course, whether or not this is good for your garden depends a lot on the plants you have. Some will obviously not like dry soil.

Caterpillars

Caterpillars are the larvae of moths and butterflies. Notoriously, they can feed on plant leaves, causing significant damage.

To control caterpillars, you can use Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*), a natural bacteria that kills caterpillars.

Of course, you could also just handpick them off the plant and dispose of them.

Snails and Slugs

Snails and slugs are mollusks that feed on plant leaves, leaving behind holes and chewed edges.

To control snails and slugs, you can use diatomaceous earth or copper tape to create a barrier around the plant.

Another effective and inexpensive way to control snails and slugs is to use [crushed eggshells or coffee grounds](#) around the base of the plant, as these materials create a barrier that snails and slugs won't cross. Whether or not this is effective is up for debate among gardeners. However, it's easy enough and cheap enough that it's worth a try.

Preventing vs. Controlling Common Plant Pests

That last point about creating a barrier around your plants for snail control brings up a great point. There's pest control and then there's pest prevention. That would actually be a form of prevention. Obviously, prevention is better than developing a pest problem that you have to control.

[Pest prevention](#) also includes:

- regularly cleaning and sanitizing gardening tools and pots
- inspecting new plants for signs of pests or diseases before bringing them indoors
- avoiding over-fertilization or over-watering, which can weaken plants and make them more susceptible to pests.
- choosing pest-resistant plant varieties
- planting companion plants that deter pests
- using physical barriers such as row covers or netting to

keep pests away from plants

Pest prevention is often the most effective and environmentally-friendly approach. It obviously avoids the need for chemical interventions. However, even with good prevention practices in place, some pest problems may still arise. That's when you need to consider options to control them like those we've shared here.

Read More:

- [How to Battle Garden Pests Cheaply and Naturally](#)
 - [Maintaining a Garden to Keep Your Indoors and Outdoors Clean](#)
 - [Frugal Ways to Clean and Disinfect Your Garden Tools](#)
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How To Battle Garden Pests Cheaply and Naturally



Garden pests can be the bane of a home gardener's existence. You work so hard to get your plants to grow, then these bugs come along and destroy them. Are you looking for ways to battle garden pests cheaply and naturally? It's definitely possible!

It Doesn't Have To Be a Battle

Yes, we often talk about battling pests. However, it's better if you start with a few mindset. Instead of thinking about how you're going to battle garden pests cheaply and naturally, try to reframe your thinking. It's not a war. It's not a fight. Instead, it's a challenge to establish equilibrium in your garden.

After all, your garden is part of nature. So are these bugs. So, even though you don't want them to destroy your plants, you can maintain an appreciation for them. You can respect their urge to go for your plants. As you build this compassion into your gardening, it becomes mentally easier to face the challenge of how to handle them in your garden.

How To Battle Garden Pests Cheaply and Naturally

As you get ready to solve your pest problem, you want to focus on those two components: cost and natural pest repellants. You don't have to spend a lot of money to deter pests from getting into your garden. Moreover, you can do this naturally, which saves on costs and also treats your plants (and the pests) much more kindly.

5 Ways to Battle Garden Pests Cheaply and Naturally

Here are five good options:

1. Plant The Right Flowers In Your Garden

Did you know that some [flowers](#) have natural pest-repellant qualities? Therefore, if you plant these in your garden, you easily deter pests from getting into everything. For example, marigolds are a good pest repellant. Other flowers [attract specific predators](#) that will naturally take care of various pests for you. For example, catmint attracts lacewing insects, which will then prey on aphids for you, protecting your plants.

2. Baking Soda Is a Natural Pesticide

You can kill certain garden pests, such as slugs, by pouring [baking soda](#) directly on them. Alternatively, make a spray solution with baking soda and water to use as a pesticide on various plants in your garden. This is an eco-friendly natural pesticide option that hardly costs anything.

3. Dish Soap Does The Job, Too

Did you know that the [dish soap](#) that you already use in your kitchen might also be a good pest repellant? Mix organic,

natural non-bleach liquid dish soap with water. Spray this on your plants. It's a semi-natural and very affordable pesticide.

4. Make a Garlic Spray

If you want a pesticide that is even more natural than dish soap would be, then consider making a garlic spray. Puree garlic cloves, mix them with water, cayenne pepper, and a little bit of vegetable oil, then spray it on your plants.

5. Use Essential Oils

There are so many great [essential oils](#) that you can use to battle garden pests cheaply and naturally. Different pests will respond to different oils but start by trying rosemary, lavender, lemongrass, peppermint, spearmint, and orange essential oils.

Read More:

- [Ladybugs vs. Asian Ladybeetles](#)
- [Reasons Why Tomato Foliage Curl](#)
- [5 Factors That Affect Plant Growth](#)

How I Feel About the Hunting of Garden Pests



I've never had to deal with deer fussing about in my garden, but I have had plenty of squirrels, rabbits, raccoons, gophers, and cats use my raised beds as their very own buffet, walking path, and toilet. I'm speaking from my own limited experience here. But I've never felt comfortable with the idea of hunting garden [pests](#).

I used to live in a busy suburban neighborhood where the squirrels reigned supreme. Now, I live in a small community that borders rural land. There are more trees here and plenty of wildlife. Every year, I have to grapple with pests (insects and mammals, alike) enjoying my fresh produce as their own.

It's infuriating. All that effort gone when a squirrel decides to take a small chomp out of every bean [seedling](#). All that effort gone when birds get to seeds before they can even sprout. All that effort gone when a rabbit chows down on my lettuce that I've managed to protect from early bolting. All that effort when a cat decides my garden beds are its personal litter box. All that effort when something – and I can't be

sure what – decides to uproot whatever it wants in the middle of the night seemingly just for fun.

You'd think I'd be on board with hunting to get rid of garden pests, but I'm not. I recognize that hungry critters can really ruin the gardening season if they're relentless enough, but I have the same attitude towards animal pests as I do insect critters and weeds.

Taking up space

We are in their space. Humans have taken up residence where once there was nothing but nature abound. It is not my right to delete these creatures to fit my idea of the perfect garden. Instead, I try my very best to work around the nuisance.

I have a different approach to an indoor invasion, granted, but that's mainly because indoor pests pose a more significant threat to household members' health and safety.

Outside, I'm not the boss. I try to work with Mother Nature, not against her. For one, I don't feel morally comfortable killing animals to make my life easier in the context of gardening. It's my hobby. While I try to grow plenty of food to eat and save money, I won't perish if a crop gets devoured by hungry creatures. I also think there are plenty of ways to co-exist peacefully with these so-called invaders. Hunting garden pests just isn't in the cards for me.

Pest covers have really helped me stay sane this year by keeping squirrels, birds, and cabbage moths away from my delicate brassica seedlings. They've been working so well I'm considering adding them to two more beds. Barriers should be the first resort when dealing with nasty pests. I also grow extra lettuce to keep rabbits happy and out of my main beds. Most of my beds are high enough to keep small critters out, too.

Cats seem to trot whoever they please no matter what I do, but the pest covers have done wonders to keep their paws out of my beds. I even still plant catnip to invite them to visit because I enjoy the company of sweet, docile neighborhood kitties.

Breathe and reflect

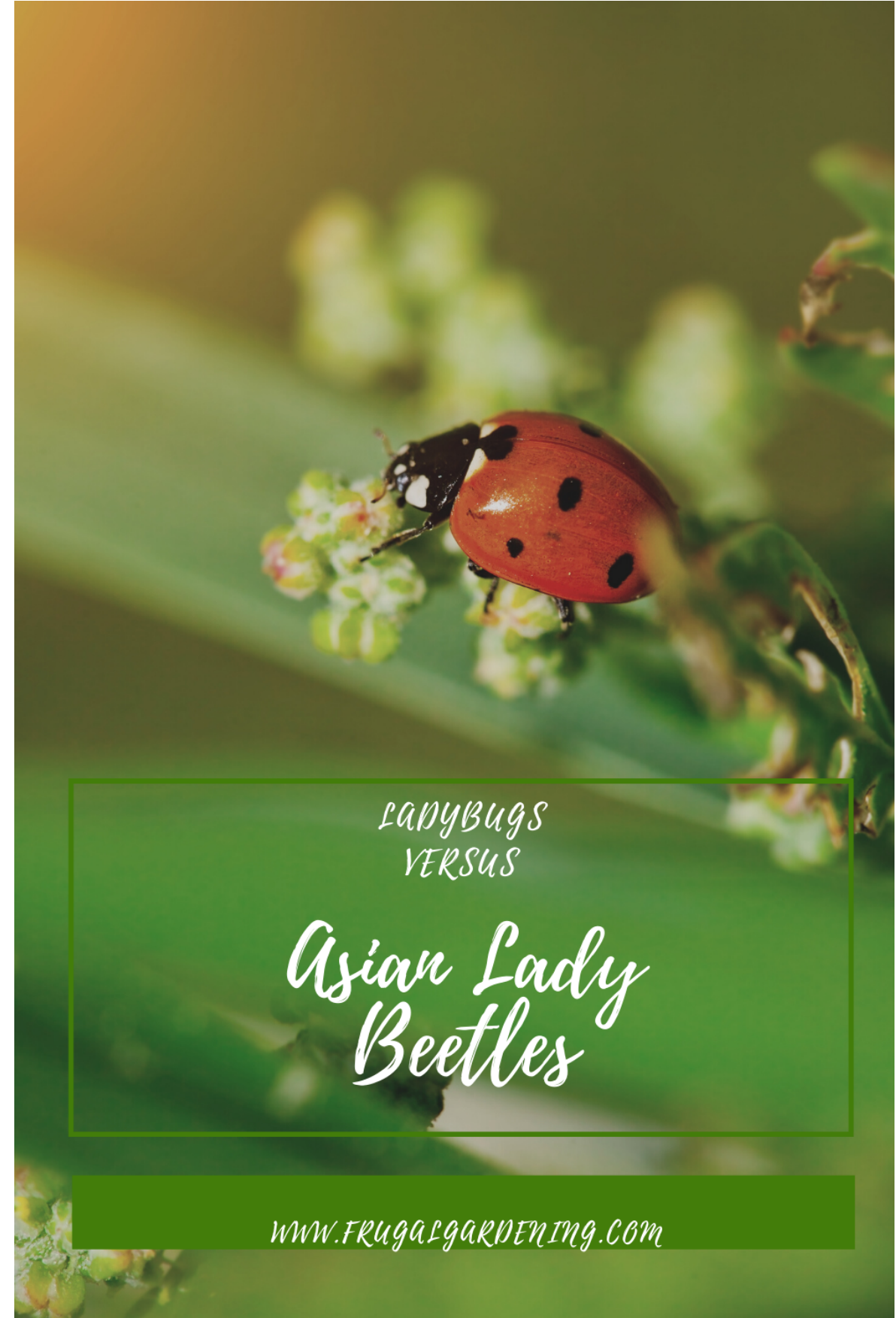
I am an impatient gardener, and even I can find a moment to take a deep breath and ask myself if getting worked up is worth it. Would it be easy to murder all the squirrels running around my plots? Absolutely! It wouldn't be psychologically simple, but it would really eliminate a big problem for me. Still, I don't think it's my right to say what belongs where.

I decided to enter the world of gardening, and I made a deal with myself that I would work with the forces of nature and not against them. Who am I to know what the consequences of my actions might be? Haven't we, as humans already made poor decisions in this regard? Pesticide use for pest control has decimated bee populations and is having important ramifications.

Yes, it's harder to take the long road. But a little effort is what it takes to grow a plant from seed in the first place. Surely, as gardeners, we have it in us to accept and handle a few extra roadblocks on our way to success.

If this kind of gardening philosophy appeals to you, I highly recommend reading Michael Pollan's book [*Second Nature: A Gardener's Education*](#). It's a book that changed the way I think about how I view so-called garden invaders.

Ladybugs Versus Asian Lady Beetles



LADYBUGS
VERSUS

Asian Lady Beetles

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Gardeners—especially those new to the hobby—may find it tough to distinguish between bad bugs and [beneficial insects](#). It can take some time to get a hang of which bugs to leave alone and

which to squish dead. Unfortunately, some good garden bugs have evil lookalikes. Case in point: ladybugs versus Asian lady beetles.

How can you tell the two apart? And which one do you want to keep around while you kick the other to the curb?

Ladybugs versus Asian Lady Beetles

Many gardeners are happy to find ladybugs hanging around their plots. While they don't pollinate plants like bees and butterflies, they hungrily snatch up a variety of garden pests, including [aphids](#).

The Asian lady beetle, on the other hand, is considered a pest. They leave behind a smelly yellow residue and because they aren't native to North America, they've quickly overtaken resources destined for native ladybugs. They also bite and tend to gather in large groups—yuck!

While lady beetles look quite similar to ladybugs, they aren't even the same species! Confused yet? Not to worry, here's a breakdown of the differences between the two:

Ladybugs

- do not bite
- are beneficial garden insects
- eat pests like mites, aphids, and whiteflies
- are bright red and have black spots
- are very round (or oval-shaped)
- have nearly all-black heads with two distinct white markings
- overwinter outdoors

Ladybeetles

- are biters
- eat some garden pests

- gather in groups and often turn into household pests during the colder months
- leave behind yellow goop with a nasty smell, it's not dangerous but it can stain surfaces
- are bigger than ladybugs
- have a coloring that varies from red to orange
- have a pointier shape
- always have a white M or W-shaped marking on their head

What do you do if you have lady beetles around or inside your home? Vacuum them up and immediately dispose of them. You can also buy store-bought traps to catch them. [Orkin](#) pest control recommends making sure all cracks and gaps in your home's exterior are filled. Additionally, if you're struggling to control the issue, don't wait before calling in the help of experts.

Another Nasty Beetle

Another Asian beetle that wreaks havoc on gardens is the Japanese beetle. It's actually more destructive than the Asian lady beetle, but a lot easier to tell apart. Instead of red-coloring, Japanese beetles have iridescent reddish-green carapaces that shimmer in the sunlight.

They would be lovely to look at if they didn't eat everything in their path! Thankfully, they tend to attack gardens in cycles. One year, you might have a swarm of Japanese beetles descending on your beans and flowers, and the next they might be gone altogether.

Need some help with identification? Check out this helpful YouTube video:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9SyPD_qn_ZU