BOHART Museum of Entomology University of California, Davis

INFORMATION

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Fig Beetles

Adult fig beetle. Photo courtesy of A. Richards.

Green fig beetles, green fruit or figeater beetles are scarab beetles in the species *Cotinus mutabilis*. These are among the largest and most colorful native beetles in California with their bright, metallic green backs and legs, with brown sides. Adults are about 1 inch long.

Fig beetles are native to the Southwestern U.S. where they feed on cactus fruit and tree sap. They have become relatively common in suburban gardens because of the ready availability of food. Adult fig beetles are attracted to sweet materials, such as soft-skinned fruit both on the tree and on the ground. They have been found as far north as Sacramento, but they may occur further north in the valley, especially as seasons grow warmer.

Adults emerge in the summer months, usually between July and September. They are active during the day unlike most other scarab beetles in the same region. Fig beetles are attracted to the odors of ripe fruit, fermentation and manure. Males and females will aggregate in shaded areas near larval food sites, such as compost piles. This is where females lay their eggs.

Fig beetle larvae develop in and feed on decaying plant material in compost and manure piles and organic mulch. They are thick bodied grubs, with a blackish head and off-white body. At rest they commonly curl into a C-shape. The larvae grow up to 2 inches long before they are ready to pupate, generally in the spring. Adults emerge several months later.

These beetles are usually not considered pests, although the adults feed on ripe fruit, particularly stone fruits, and large numbers of adults can damage a lot of fruit. In gardens they can eat an entire fig or grape crop. However, they do not damage trees or lawns the way Japanese beetles or June beetles (white grub) can do.

Controlling fig beetles generally involves management of fruit and compost. Fruit should be harvested as it ripens or before its completely ripe. Picking up fallen fruit is also important. Control also involves managing piles of organic debris. Covering compost, mulch and manure piles with screen will prevent females from ovipositing. Insecticides are ineffective in controlling this beetle.

Larval fig beetles. Photo by Jack Kelly Clark