



Blister Beetles

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Description: Gray, black, tan, or striped. Slender, 1/2 to 3/4 inch long.

Common Host Plant(s): Alfalfa and weed plants in hay fields as well as many different ornamentals, bedding plants, and some vegetables. Blister beetles can sometimes be dried and harvested with hay, particularly if a conditioner or crimper is used when the hay is cut.

Damage: Beetles eat leaves sometimes in damaging numbers. Larvae do not feed on plants and instead feed on grasshopper eggs and are therefore beneficial.

Distribution: Throughout United States. Usually occur late in season and the infestations are usually localized.

Lifecycle: Blister beetles have seven instars and overwinter as mature larvae in the soil. After pupation in the spring, adults begin to emerge in early summer and by midsummer reach their peak population. During summer months blister beetles feed on plant foliage or flowers and mate. Eggs are laid in the soil in groups of 50 to 300 eggs. Ten to 21 days' later larvae emerge from these eggs and search for their preferred food--grasshopper eggs. As larvae molt and grow their activity decreases. When they reach the fifth instar they move into the soil, molt again, and remain overwinter in the soil as sixth instars.

Cultural Control: Handpick beetles, but wear gloves while picking; the beetles discharge a caustic fluid that may blister the skin.

Organic/Biological Control: Botanical insecticides work as contact insecticides, check label rates and plants that can be sprayed

Chemical Control: Spot spray where found with an insecticide labeled for that plant. If treating vegetables, follow the wait period before harvest.

Horses: Do not feed hay with dead blister beetles to livestock, especially horses; they can have a severe or fatal reaction.



From Left to right: *Epicauta funebris* - Margined Blister Beetle, *Epicauta vittata* - Striped Blister Beetle *Meloe* - Oil Beetles. Photos by Eric Day, Virginia Tech