

Managing Squash Bugs Organically

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The squash bug (*Anasa tristis*) is a major pest of cucurbit (squash, cucumbers, pumpkins, etc.) plants in North America. The adult bugs overwinter in residue from the previous year's cucurbit crops, or in other debris in or near the garden. Managing squash bugs organically requires a mix of timing, physical barriers, and daily vigilance. Because these pests multiply quickly and carry cucurbit yellow vine disease, stopping them early is essential for saving your melons, cucumbers, pumpkins, zucchini, and squash.

1. Physical Barriers & Companion Planting

Protect young plants right at transplanting by using floating row covers. Secure the edges tightly with soil or pins to keep overwintered adults from crawling underneath. Remember to remove the covers once flowers appear so bees can pollinate. Additionally, plant repellent companions nearby, like nasturtiums, alliums, marigolds, and radishes, to help confuse the bugs' sense of smell.

2. Manual Removal

Squash bugs love to hide in dark, damp spaces overnight. Lay pieces of cardboard or small wooden boards on the soil next to your vines. Every morning, flip the boards over to find the adults hiding underneath. Drop them into a bucket of soapy water to drown them. Pick any adults and nymphs off the stems and leaves, then drop them into the soapy water.

3. Scrape the Eggs

Check under the leaves of the plants for eggs. Squash bugs lay neat clusters of bronze, football-shaped eggs. Use a dull knife, an old credit card, or duct tape wrapped around your fingers to scrape or lift the eggs off the leaf tissue. Destroying the eggs prevents the next generation of destructive nymphs from hatching. Finally, practice strict garden sanitation by cleaning up all vine debris in the fall to remove their winter hiding spots.



Photo by: John Obermeyer

References:

<https://extension.colostate.edu/resource/squash-bug-management-in-home-gardens/>

<https://ipm.ucanr.edu/home-and-landscape/squash-bugs/>