Red Sweet Potato Beetle

What is it?

It is an insect on sweet potato (and wild morning glory plants). It is smaller than the beetle on pumpkin and other cucurbits (see Fact Sheet no. 40). The scientific name is *Monolepta*.

Damage

Adult beetles (photo, right) feed on leaves (photo, left) and flowers. If the attack occurs soon after planting, the growth of the cuttings is poor; this delays crop maturity, and possibly the yield of storage roots. The larvae probably feed on roots and underground stems.

How do I identify it?

Look for red, oval beetles, about 6 mm long, making holes between the leaf veins. They have a small black triangular spot at the base of the wing cases, and are black underneath. Adults are strong fliers, and fly when disturbed.

How to manage red sweet potato beetle

**Cultural Control**

- Avoid planting new crops next to those where large numbers of beetles are present;
- Practice good crop hygiene: collect and destroy vines after harvest
- Promote healthy plant growth with manures, mulches, fertilizers, and adequate water;
- In the early morning or evening, catch the beetles in flight. Perhaps a game for children!

**Resistant Varieties:** None known, but fast-growing varieties may outgrow the damage caused by the beetles

**Chemical Control**

- Spread ashes over the crop as soon as the beetles are seen (see Fact Sheet no. 56d);
- Use synthetic pyrethroid insecticides, such as lambda cyhalothrin or permethrin;
- Use derris. A local Derris variety, originally from Papua New Guinea, is being multiplied by MAL and the Kastom Gaden Association (see Fact Sheet no. 56c).

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