

## Natural Potato Beetle Repellent

<http://homeguides.sfgate.com/natural-potato-beetle-repellent-26948.html>

Despite their name, Colorado potato beetles bedevil vegetable growers far beyond the borders of the Rocky Mountain state -- and they don't just stick to taters. Eggplants, peppers and tomatoes can also fall victim to adult and larval potato beetles. The striped insects prefer the leaves of edible crops. If they destroy enough of this foliage, the plant itself will suffer and either die or produce fewer vegetables.

### **Mulch**

Effective for conserving water and suppressing weeds, mulch also makes a good defense against potato beetles. The adult insects are disinclined to cross mulch barriers when traveling over soil, according to *Sunset* magazine. Use a rough-surfaced mulch, such as a thick layer of straw, around emerging potato plants. Thick, coarse mulches make better choices than easily traversed options such as plastic mulch or landscape fabric.

### **Commercial Products**

To cope with infestations of the potato beetle, Rodale's "Ultimate Encyclopedia of Organic Gardening" recommends neem spray, which uses oil extracted from the neem tree (*Azadirachta indica*). Neem is an effective repellent that is gentle on beneficial insects. Other organic insect control options include products derived from the fungus *Beauveria brassiana* and the bacterial derivative spinosad, which repel and sometimes kill potato beetles.

### **Homemade Sprays**

Some organic gardeners rely on a broad-spectrum homemade spray to repel insects, notes the Rodale encyclopedia. Consider creating your own garlic oil, which involves soaking a dozen chopped garlic cloves in 1 pint of mineral oil, then strain and bottle. Alternatively, blend one part chopped hot pepper with four parts hot water, strain and bottle. Nonsqueamish organic gardeners capture several potato beetles or other problematic insects, puree them with soapy water, strain and bottle as a kind of olfactory "scare tactic" against future pests.

### **Companion Planting**

Interplanting your rows of beetle-afflicted vegetables with green beans provides some protection against potato beetles. Green beans have compounds that repel the insect pests. To avoid shading other vegetables with vining green beans, choose bush-type beans. Several pungent plants also have a reputation for repelling a broad range of predatory insects. Garlic, catnip, chives and nasturtiums may provide your vegetables some additional protection against the potato beetle.

### **Considerations**

Over-reacting against minor potato beetle infestations may do more harm than good. Potatoes can lose as much as a third of their leaves to potato beetles without harm to the edible roots, according to the University of Kentucky. Remember that each pest control method you undertake has potential consequences -- even natural repellents. For example, some organic farmers grow mustard greens a year before growing potatoes to discourage soilborne pests. Yet that method of natural fumigation may also kill the beneficial nematodes that feed on potato beetle larvae, notes the agricultural journal "Biological Control." Observe your garden carefully to determine exactly how harmful insect pests are before turning to repellents. Handpicking potato beetles from your edible crops along with rotating vegetable beds each year are both effective procedures against the Colorado potato bug.