

# Controlling Squash Bugs

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This pest is difficult to control in an organic garden without pesticides. The following are a list of recommendations gleaned from several web-based fliers from agricultural science departments around the country.

Squash bugs overwinter as adults and emerge in the spring to feed and deposit eggs on squash plants. The young (nymphs) feed on squash plants and grow into adults. Squash Bugs may produce two generations in a growing season supplying overwintering adults for the next season, and completing the life cycle for this pest.

## **Getting started**

“Resistant” varieties. While no squash varieties are truly resistant some are reported to be more preferred by the insects. Summer Squashes and Pumpkins are least resistant to squash bugs (most damaged), and winter squashes such as Butternut, Royal Acorn, and Sweet Cheese are reported to be most resistant (least damaged). Cucumber, a squash relative is reported to be resistant.

Growing seedlings and transplanting into the garden. Although squash seed can typically be planted directly into the ground, young seedlings and plants are the most damaged by direct feeding of emerging adults. This damage may be reduced if plants are started in pots at home, and transplanted into the garden after they have hardened off.

No Mulch. When Squash bugs are problematic, it is recommended that the squash be planted without mulching. The bugs like to hide in debris when they are not feeding on your plants.

## **Control**

Plant care. Maintaining a healthy plant through proper fertilization and watering are also to limiting squash bug damage.

Squishing Squash Bug Eggs. Monitor the undersides of leaves at least once a week and destroy the eggs as pictured below. This may not stop the first wave of damage from emerging overwintering adults, but it will help us interrupt the life cycle and reduce the number of overwintering adults for the next season.

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The eggs, typically laid on the underside of leaves between the veins, get darker as they near hatching. Reports of hatching range from 5 – 14 days.

Diatomaceous Earth (DE). Food Grade DE application around the base of the plant is reported to be an effective method to control squash bug and is a treatment allowed in Certified Organic vegetable production. Apply to the un-mulched ground. Do not use swimming pool DE as it contains toxic levels of free silica.

Killing Adults. Place boards or shingles on the bare ground next to the plants. At night the squash bugs will aggregate under the boards and can then be destroyed each morning. Destroying the breeding adults may reduce the damage early in the season, and help us to interrupt the life cycle.