

# Shieldbugs and stink bugs

GWF262

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These large, conspicuous insects may look as though they could damage your plants, but for the most part they are harmless. Related anthocorid bugs can be positively helpful.

**Q** Tell me more about bugs

**A** Many people regard all insects as bugs but the name is used more precisely to refer to insects with sucking mouthparts - the Hemiptera. This group includes plant pests such as greenfly, whitefly, capsids and leafhoppers which can cause considerable damage by removing plant sap and transmitting diseases. Please see the specific factsheets for more about individual pests.

Certain other bugs also feed on plant sap but only occur in small numbers so do little damage. Others are carnivorous, feeding on insects including aphids and winter moth caterpillars.

**Q** Tell me more about shieldbugs

**A** Shieldbugs are about the size of a fingernail or approx 1-1.5cm, shield- or oval-shaped, often with broad, pronounced shoulders. They are usually green, often with spots and dots on their back, and superficially resemble beetles. Several species occur in gardens, living on trees and other woody plants. These include green shieldbug (*Palomena prasina*), hawthorn shieldbug (*Acanthosoma haemorrhoidale*), birch shieldbug (*Elasmotethus*

*interstinctus*) and dock shieldbug (*Coreus marginatus*).

**Q** When will I see them?

**A** Shieldbugs are most numerous in late summer and early autumn and can be seen sunning themselves on plant leaves. They overwinter as adults and lay eggs in mid-spring or early summer. The immature nymphs are smaller, with a more rounded body shape.

**Q** Tell me more about stink bugs.

**A** Stink bugs (*Pentatoma rufipes*), also known as forest or place bugs, live on a wide range of plants, including cherries, nuts and raspberries. They are reddish-brown, about 15mm long, with an orange spot in the centre of their backs, between their folded wings. They overwinter as immature nymphs, reaching adulthood during the summer. At cherry- and raspberry-picking time they are present, often in large numbers. Although they will eat foliage or suck plant sap, they mainly hunt caterpillars and other insects among the leaves. Unfortunately, they emit a powerful smell when handled, which can taint fruit. They also

leave sticky secretions on the plants, which can make raspberry picking rather unpleasant.

**Q** What can I do about stink bugs?

**A** Normally there is no need to do anything, but if they infest trees every year, grease bands around the tree trunks will control them. They spend the winter in foliage at the base of the tree and climb up the trunk in spring. Use a specially developed tree grease, not lubricating grease which can damage the bark

As they thrive in grassy places, removing grass and replacing it with bare soil or a mulch will also help discourage them.

On raspberries, a garden insecticide containing *pyrethrum*, such as PY Insect Killer, or rape seed oil will probably control them. Don't forget to leave the recommended safety period between spraying the bushes and picking the fruit.