

EXTENSIVE CHANGES TO THE AIR POTATO BEETLE BIOLOGICAL CONTROL PROGRAM



The air potato beetle biocontrol agents are officially established in the state!

Each year the beetles overwinter through the long vine dormant period and surviving beetles emerge, reproduce and spread throughout the general area each summer. Research shows the beetles have reduced vine coverage, bulbil production, and bulbil size in many parts of the state. Overall this means the beetles are winning against the vine!

Due to the success of the program, the FDACS Division of Plant Industry (DPI), Bureau of Methods Development and Biological Control in Gainesville is now the sole beetle provider. Due to the popularity of the beetles and number of requests, the requestor link was closed to allow the division to provide free beetles to those residents who have already requested them.



Because of high public demand and a limited beetle supply, remaining beetle supplies must be used effectively to ensure widespread vine impact and insect establishment. Moving forward, DPI will send beetles to requesters in the following quantities:

- Isolated areas - 50 beetles
- County-wide clusters of requestors - 25 beetles
- In areas where beetles are currently established or multiple requestors are within a small area - 15 beetles

In addition to altering the number of beetles sent, the “first come, first serve” basis of the program has changed. Priority will be given to infestations in or near conservation and preservation areas, and counties where the beetles have not yet established. The FDACS Division of Plant Industry will continue to ensure beetles are sent into every county across the state.

To help determine where the vine persists and where beetles have not appeared by summer, a link will open for citizens to report air potato vine infestations. This form will help identify release location priorities for 2021.

Keep in mind, vines generally begin to regrow in the spring approximately one month before beetles begin to emerge and reproduce. These beetles require weeks to begin feeding and multiplying. As the beetles increase in numbers throughout the summer they self-disperse to new vine locations. Therefore, do not expect to see beetles at any given vine infestation until late spring or summer.