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Join Cornell Researchers to Help Fight Landscape Pest

Researchers at Cornell are joining with “Citizen Scientists” to learn more about an invasive pest, the viburnum leaf beetle. Gardeners, youth and others will help track the beetle’s movement across the state and provide scientists with information that could help reduce damage from the pest.

A small tree or shrub, many native and imported species of viburnum flourish throughout the Northeast in old fields, woods and landscape plantings. Viburnum leaf beetles arrived in Rochester, N.Y., from Canada in 1996. Originally from Europe, the pest faces few natural enemies here, and is spreading quickly across the state and into neighboring states. It could be poised to move into the Hudson Valley and New York metro area.

The pest’s eggs hatch in late April or early May and the larvae feed on the shrub’s leaves. Later in summer, adults can return to feed on the same plants. Repeated defoliation over several years can weaken and kill viburnums, points out Dr. Paul Weston, the Cornell entomologist who is the technical expert on the project.

“We’re excited about this project because involves ordinary citizens in gathering valuable information,” says project coordinator Lori Bushway, a Senior Extension Associate in the Department of Horticulture. The project is similar to Citizen Science projects pioneered by Cornell’s Laboratory of Ornithology, she adds. For example, bird watchers report what species visit their feeders and researchers use the information to analyze bird populations, for example.

In this case, Citizen Scientists will be looking for infested viburnums and reporting them via the Internet. The project’s website (<http://www.hort.cornell.edu/VLB>) also has detailed pictures that make it easy to identify the beetle and its viburnum hosts.

“You don’t have to be a horticultural expert to participate,” says Bushway. For more information, contact her at ljb7@cornell.edu or 607-255-5918.

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300 words