

## SOLDIER BEETLES<sup>1</sup>

Soldier beetles are members of the family Cantharidae. When brightly colored, their wing covers give the appearance of soldier uniforms. Soldier beetles are otherwise known as “leatherwings” due to their soft, cloth-like wing covers. Soldier beetles are elongate, soft-bodied, and about ½ inch long. Their color ranges from yellow to red with brown or black wings or trim. Soldier beetles can resemble lightning bugs, but they have no light-producing organs. One group of beetles easily confused with soldier beetles is the blister beetles. Blister beetles can be pests, and they are distinguished from soldier beetles by their square-shaped heads and very visible “necks.”

Adult female soldier beetles lay their eggs in the soil in clusters. The larvae appear velvety and exhibit dense bristles. Larvae also have antenna-like projections on their heads. The majority of larvae are carnivorous, and feed on insects in the soil. One can find soldier beetle larvae overwintering in moist soil and organic debris.

Adult soldier beetles are also predacious, as they will eat caterpillars, eggs, aphids, and other soft-bodied insects. Alternatively, they may eat nectar and pollen if they cannot find prey. Soldier beetles do not damage plant foliage. Adults are often found on flowers such as Queen Anne’s lace and fireweed, where they lie in wait for prey, feed on pollen, and mate.

Killing beneficial insects like soldier beetles is not recommended. However, they may become a nuisance in autumn if large numbers of larvae enter a dwelling in search of a place to overwinter. Weather-stripping and caulking will usually prevent soldier beetles from entering homes. Vacuum cleaners are useful in removing soldier beetles that make their way indoors.



**Fig. 1. Soldier beetle on leaf. By A.L. Antonelli.**

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<sup>1</sup> Information derived from Soldier Beetle fact sheets on the Dept. of Entomology websites of the Universities of Kentucky and Iowa. Stephanie Bailey and Donald Lewis, preparers.