



Department
for Environment,
Food & Rural Affairs

Factsheet: Colorado beetle (*Leptinotarsa decemlineata*) March 2026

Status in law

Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales)

Colorado beetle is a quarantine pest for Great Britain. It is not present in Great Britain. There are strict plant health regulations to prevent its introduction and spread.

It's a notifiable pest. This means you must report it if you suspect its presence.

Northern Ireland

Colorado beetle is a quarantine pest for Northern Ireland. It is not present in Northern Ireland. There are strict plant health regulations to prevent its introduction and spread.

It's a notifiable pest. This means you must report it if you suspect its presence.

Detecting Colorado beetle

What to look for

Feeding damage and droppings



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Colorado beetles cause damage by feeding on the leaves, creating large holes.

They can also completely strip the leaves from plants leaving only the stems behind.

As they feed, they leave their dark green and black droppings on leaves and stems.

Adult beetles



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Adult Colorado beetles:

- are oval-shaped and very shiny
- have irregular black spots at the front
- have antennae with tips that do not widen (not clubbed)
- have obvious black and yellow striped wing cases
- are between 6 and 12 millimetres (mm) long

If present, they are likely to emerge from the soil in spring and summer.

Larvae



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Colorado beetle larvae are pink, red or orange. They can be between 1.5 and 15mm in length, depending on the larval stage.

They have:

- smooth and shiny body surface
- two rows of equal size black spots along each side and a plain red back
- black legs and heads

They are active and mobile.

Affected plants

Colorado beetle is a serious pest of potato (*Solanum tuberosum*).

The larvae and adults also feed on other wild and cultivated plants of the Nightshade family (*Solanaceae*), such as:

- woody nightshade (*Solanum dulcamara*)
- tomato (*Solanum lycopersicum*)
- aubergine (*Solanum melongena*)
- pepper (*Capsicum annuum*)

Similar beetles

Harlequin ladybird (*Harmonia axyridis*)



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Adult harlequin ladybirds can vary in colour and markings. However, they are different from Colorado beetles because they have:

- red or orange round and humped bodies with black spots
- a white head with a dark 'M' shape with long dark spots
- antennae that slightly widen at the tip (clubbed) – this can be difficult to see sometimes

Pupae of harlequin and other ladybird species are often mistaken for Colorado beetle larvae.



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Pupa of harlequin ladybirds have orange or red bodies. However, their bodies:

- have two rows of black spots running along the back, rather than along each side – their number and size can vary
- are wrinkled and attached to a solid surface
- have spines at one end – the remains of the moulted skin – and no visible legs

Their heads are difficult to see.

The pupal stage of harlequin ladybirds is inactive. They do not feed.

14-spot ladybird (*Propylea quatuordecimpunctata*)



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14-spot ladybirds are different from Colorado beetles because they have:

- round, humped and shiny yellow bodies
- black dots that often connect into patterns on their bodies
- heads that are yellow and black, never orange with black spots
- antennae that slightly widen at the tip (clubbed) – this can be difficult to see sometimes

They are much smaller in size than Colorado beetles, being between 3.5 and 4.5mm long.

Burying beetle (*Nicrophorus investigator*)



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Burying beetles can be distinguished from Colorado beetle because they have more elongated bodies ending in a point that sticks out beyond the wing cases.

They have:

- black bodies with orange and jagged stripes that run across the body, not along the length
- black heads with no markings
- antennae that widen at the tip (clubbed)

Wasp beetle (*Clytus arietis*)



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Wasp beetles have long and narrow bodies. They have:

- black bodies with yellow stripes that run across the body, not along it
- black heads with a yellow band behind the head (pronotum)
- antennae that do not widen at the tip (not clubbed)

Spotted longhorn beetle (*Rutpela maculata*)



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Spotted longhorn beetles can be distinguished from Colorado beetle because they:

- have yellow long bodies with black spots and bands, rather than yellow with straight black stripes
- have a black head
- have long antennae, about half the length of the body, that do not widen at the tip

Cockchafer beetle (*Melolontha melolontha*)



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Cockchafer beetles have:

- brown bodies with dark ridges running along the length – these ridges are never black and yellow
- grey-brown heads
- clubbed antennae that can look like small fingers or be held closely together
- a more elongated body that ends in a point sticking out beyond the wing cases
- a dull body surface, not a shiny one

Rosemary beetle (*Chrysolina americana*)



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Rosemary beetles have a very shiny and oval-shaped body, but unlike Colorado beetle they have:

- metallic green wing cases with purple stripes
- metallic green and purple heads

Potential impact on the UK

It is extremely important that Colorado beetles do not enter or spread within the UK.

If they became established in the UK, they could cause serious economic damage to Solanaceous crops, especially potatoes.

Growers would see a drop in the quality and yield. This would affect marketability and profitability.

As each female can lay up to 2000 eggs, a breeding colony could be established by a single fertilised beetle escaping detection.

Presence and spread

Where it's present

The Colorado beetle is present in most of Europe, the Americas and some regions in Western, Central, and East Asia such as Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and some parts of China.

Notable interceptions and outbreaks

In the UK, an outbreak of Colorado beetle was discovered in Kent in 2023. This was the first outbreak since the 1970s.

It was declared eradicated in 2025.

How it spreads

Colorado beetles are occasionally imported into the UK as 'hitchhikers' on fresh or frozen leafy vegetables, herbs and grain from fields previously planted with potato.

They can travel long distances when carried by the wind – especially in spring – or on floating debris across sea water.

They can also spread through the import of potatoes from countries where it is present. This is more likely to happen in spring and early summer.

Reducing the risk

To reduce the risk of the Colorado beetle being introduced to the UK, you can:

- be alert to imported consignments from areas where the Colorado beetle is present
- inspect imported produce carefully on arrival and avoid mixing consignments
- ensure staff can recognise Colorado beetles and know what to look for
- dispose of plant debris safely and away from any packing station

What to do if you suspect Colorado beetle

You must immediately report the sighting to the relevant authority.

Trap the larvae or beetles

If you find a Colorado beetle, larva or pupa trap the insect in a secure container if possible.

Report the suspected sighting

England and Wales

Contact the Plant Health and Seeds Inspectorate (PHSI) at the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA).

Email: planthealth.info@apha.gov.uk

Telephone: 0300 1000 313

For finds on trees in the wider environment, [report through Tree Alert](#).

Or get in touch with your local APHA Plant Health and Seeds Inspector, if you know who they are.

Scotland

Contact the relevant team depending on where you've found it:

- **for finds on agricultural crops**, visit <https://www.ruralpayments.org/topics/contact-us> for the contact details of your local Rural Payments and Inspections Division (RPID)
- **for finds on non-agricultural crops**, email the Scottish Government's Horticulture and Marketing Unit (HMU) at hort.marketing@gov.scot
- **for finds on trees in the wider environment**, [report through Tree Alert](#)

Northern Ireland

Contact the Plant Health Inspection Branch at Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA).

Email: planthealth@daera-ni.gov.uk

Telephone: 0300 200 7847

For finds on trees in the wider environment, [report through TreeCheck](#).