



Department
for Environment,
Food & Rural Affairs

Factsheet: potato flea beetle (*Epitrix cucumeris*, *E. papa*, *E. subcrinita* and *E. tuberis*)

March 2026

Status in law

Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales)

Four species of potato flea beetle (*Epitrix*) are quarantine pests for Great Britain. They are not present in Great Britain. There are strict plant health regulations to prevent their introduction and spread.

They're notifiable pests. This means you must report them if you suspect their presence.

Northern Ireland

Four species of potato flea beetle (*Epitrix*) are subject to emergency pest measures in Northern Ireland. They are not present in Northern Ireland. There are strict plant health regulations to prevent its introduction and spread.

They're notifiable pests. This means you must report them if you suspect their presence.

Detecting potato flea beetle (*Epitrix*)

What to look for

Feeding damage on leaves



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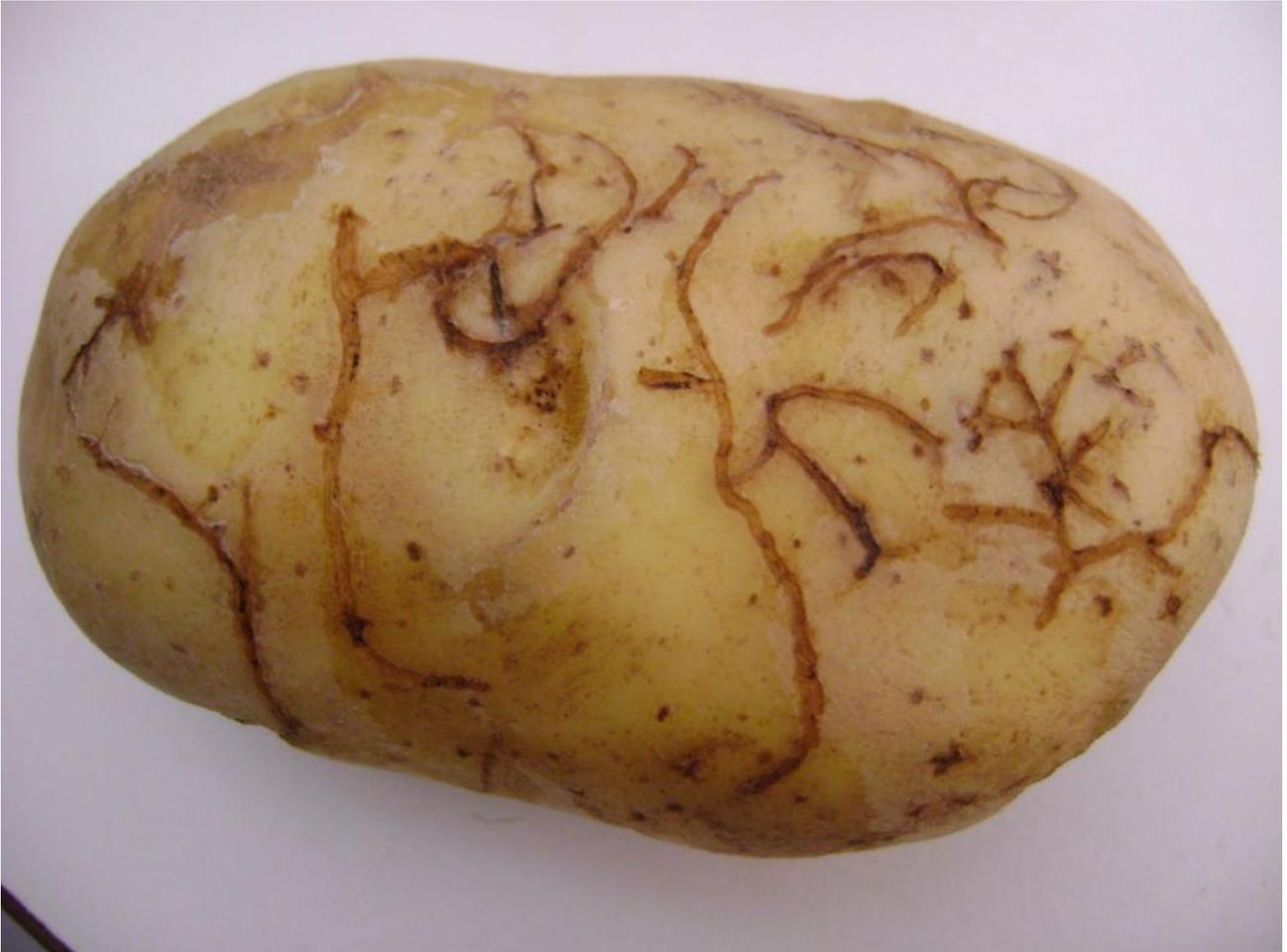
Adults feed on potato leaves and chew tiny circular holes, between 1 and 1.5 millimetres (mm) wide. This creates a clear 'shot-hole' pattern across the leaf surface.



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Potato flea beetle is hard to identify by appearance alone, as different species look very similar. It is more likely to be noticed because of the damage it causes.

Damage to tubers caused by larvae



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Larval feeding causes the most serious damage.

Larvae feed below ground on roots and tubers. On tubers, this creates shallow, wavy tunnels just under the skin. It also causes deeper holes in the tuber flesh.

This leads to:

- damage that is often only visible when harvested
- marks that reduce quality, but can usually be removed by peeling
- lower value and marketability of potato crops

Severe damage can make a whole crop unmarketable.

Adult beetles



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The adult potato flea beetle is:

- very small, between 1.5 and 2mm long
- dark coloured
- oval, convex and covered in fine hairs

It jumps when disturbed, which is why it's called 'flea beetle'.

Life stages in soil

The beetle lays eggs in the soil near the base of potato plants.

Newly hatched larvae move towards the roots and tubers to feed. Pupation also happens in the soil.

Both adults and pupae can overwinter in soil and crop debris, then emerge in spring.

Affected plants

Potato flea beetles are a serious pest of potatoes. They complete their development on plants in the nightshade family (Solanaceae). They most commonly feed on:

- aubergine (*Solanum melongena*)
- black nightshade (*Solanum nigrum*)
- cape gooseberry (*Physalis* spp.)
- cut-leaved nightshade (*Solanum triflorum*)
- petunia (*Petunia*)
- potato (*Solanum tuberosum*)
- sweet pepper / chili pepper (*Capsicum annuum*)
- Thorn apple (*Datura stramonium*)
- tobacco (*Nicotiana tabacum*)
- tomato (*Solanum lycopersicum*)

Adult beetles can also feed on the leaves of many other crops and weeds. These include:

- beans (*Phaseolus* spp.)
- beet (*Beta vulgaris*)
- cabbage (*Brassica oleracea*)
- common amaranth (*Amaranthus retroflexus*)
- cucumber (*Cucumis sativus*)
- Fat hen (*Chenopodium album*)
- lettuce (*Lactuca sativa*)
- maize (*Zea mays*)

Similar pests

There are two flea beetle species native to Great Britain that belong to the same group – *Epitrix atropae* and *Epitrix pubescens*.

However, these species do not damage potato tubers.

There is a native species also known as potato flea beetle – *Psylliodes affinis*. It is common and widespread in England and Wales.

Potential impact on the UK

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

If it became established in the UK, it could cause serious economic damage to plants in the nightshade family. Most notably potatoes.

Experience from other countries shows that:

- potato yield does not always fall, but the quality and value of tubers are often greatly reduced
- affected consignments can be rejected by processors and packers

Eradication would be very difficult or impossible unless an outbreak was detected early. This is due to the wide range of plants the beetles can feed on.

Insecticide use would need to increase. This is especially true for potatoes sold commercially where even small amounts of damage are unacceptable.

Good crop rotation, and controlling volunteer potatoes and host weeds, would be important. Control would be costly and difficult.

Presence and spread

Where it's present

Potato flea beetle (*Epitrix*) has been found in:

- Portugal
- Spain
- North America
- parts of South America

Notable interceptions and outbreaks

Potato flea beetle was first reported in Portugal in 2008.

Damage caused by this pest had been observed several years earlier, but the cause was unknown at the time. By 2008, it had spread to all potato growing regions in Portugal.

In 2010, damage was found during official surveys in northern Spain. It is now present in three Spanish regions – Galicia, Asturias and Andalucia.

The beetles found in Europe have been confirmed as *Epitrix cucumeris* and *E. papa*.

In 2015 and 2016, several consignments of ware potatoes imported into the UK from Spain showed:

- potato flea beetle feeding damage
- dead larvae associated with tubers

Some of these consignments came from areas thought to be free from the pest and had arrived with soil attached.

There have been no findings in the UK since 2016.

How it spreads

Potato flea beetles can spread over long distances through seed and ware potatoes with soil attached.

There is concern about imports from Portugal and Spain. Imports from North and South America are prohibited.

Adult beetles, pupae and possibly larvae can all be present on tubers, or in soil.

Adult beetles can fly, which would allow them to spread quickly if it entered the UK.

Reducing the risk

The most effective way to control potato flea beetle is to prevent its introduction.

This can be done by:

- being alert to signs of the pest on consignments from Portugal or Spain
- being aware that regulations typically require washing or brushing of potatoes to remove soil that may contain the pest before export from infested countries

What to do if you suspect potato flea beetle (Epitrix)

You must immediately report the sighting to the relevant authority.

Trap the beetles or larvae if possible

If you think you've found potato flea beetle, try to trap the insect in a secure container.

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](#).

Additional information

Check the EPPO global database for a list of countries where the four different species are present, as well as additional photos:

Epitrix cucumeris

- Distribution: <https://gd.eppo.int/taxon/EPIXCU/distribution>
- Photos: <https://gd.eppo.int/taxon/EPIXCU/photos>

Epitrix papa

- Distribution: <https://gd.eppo.int/taxon/EPIXPP/distribution>
- Photos: <https://gd.eppo.int/taxon/EPIXPP/photos>

Epitrix subcrinita

- Distribution: <https://gd.eppo.int/taxon/EPIXSU/distribution>
- Photos: <https://gd.eppo.int/taxon/EPIXSU/photos>

Epitrix tuberis

- Distribution: <https://gd.eppo.int/taxon/EPIXTU/distribution>
- Photos: <https://gd.eppo.int/taxon/EPIXTU/photos>