

# Assassin (Wheel) Bugs

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These bugs are meat-eating hunters! They are very beneficial in the landscape/garden as they prey (feed) on a wide variety of pest insects such as caterpillars, stinkbugs, aphids, and beetles. However, they are general predators and may also feed on each other and other beneficial insects. Since assassin bugs (also known as wheel bugs) are also preyed upon they have developed a unique defense system, they use their beak to squirt venom at their attacker as far as a foot away!

Assassin bugs come in many shapes and sizes as there are over 3,000 species. Their length can vary from less than ¼ inch to 1 ½ inches, and they have only one generation per year. ALL assassin bugs have a powerful, curved beak that they use to pierce and inject dissolving venom into their prey. Once the inside of the prey is turned to liquid, the assassin bug uses its beak to suck out the liquefied tissues, much like we use a straw to drink a milkshake!

This powerful beak packs a mean wallop, so be careful when working in the landscape/garden. When disturbed the wheel bug can inflict a bite described as worse than stings from bees, wasps, or hornets.

Remember they are doing free pest control in your landscape/garden, so it is very good to have them around. If you see them it is best to leave them alone, but you may want to watch them hunt for other bugs to eat. The landscape/garden can be a fascinating place to watch insects in action.

Avoid blanket spraying of insecticides and instead only spot-treat plants. Try using horticultural oils, insecticidal soaps and *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) rather than insecticides that are more toxic to you and beneficial insects. This will help to preserve these and other beneficial insects that are doing free pest control for you.

To learn more about the assassin (wheel) bug see these web links: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/in243> or <http://ipm.ifas.ufl.edu/pdf/assassinbug.doc>

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