

North Carolina wine crops face beetlemania

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North Carolina grape growers who have dealt with hurricanes, tornadoes, fungi and birds now face another threat: Japanese beetles.

Japanese beetles are most drawn to such crops as apples and sweet corn, but vineyards have been hard hit this year because of above normal rainfall that has helped spawn millions of beetles, the Raleigh (N.C.) News & Observer reported Monday.

The beetles don't eat grapes, since the insects are gone before the grapes ripen. But the beetles "skeletonize" grape leaves, eating everything but the veins, the News & Observer said.

Without leaves the vines cannot make flowers and fruit to reproduce or store energy for winter, so the plants die.

Vineyards in western states don't have the problem, since the Mississippi River seems to have kept the beetles from moving west, the newspaper said. European wine regions also don't have beetle problems.

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