

Colorado grasshopper boom causing headaches for gardeners, farmers

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If there seems to be a boom of buzzing and chirping insects bouncing

through backyards, gardens and parks this year, it's not in your head—the grasshoppers are taking over Colorado.

A warm and dry winter and spring created perfect conditions for [grasshoppers](#) to flourish this year, according to entomology experts with Colorado State University and the Butterfly Pavilion.

"Some of the farmers I work with remark it's been the worst year they've ever experienced," said Karim Gharbi, horticulture and entomology specialist with CSU's Denver County extension office. "A big part of that is climate change... the grasshoppers and the plants they're feeding on are coming out of dormancy sooner and going into dormancy later."

Parasites that normally limit grasshopper populations, including fungi and nematodes, prefer overcast, cool and moist weather and will die easily in dry conditions, Gharbi said.

His advice for people hoping to fight back against the insects?

"Just pray," Gharbi said, laughing.

For backyard gardeners, grasshoppers might be a nuisance but are largely harmless, said Cori Brant, entomology manager at the Butterfly Pavilion.

"They're mainly going to be a food source for other animals and are great for the rest of the ecosystem, including birds and reptiles," she said. "I put an extra bird feeder in my backyard and have seen a lot more birds that I've never seen before that are down in the grass, eating grasshoppers."

Folks worried about protecting their gardens can take a few steps like planting "trap crops" that the grasshoppers will go for instead—things

like [leafy greens](#), zinnias, [cereal crops](#), beans, corn, carrots and onions, Gharbi said.

But when there are so many insects, they might eat the trap crops and still be hungry for more, he said. Planting grasshoppers' least favorite meals—plants in the cucurbit and nightshade families, like summer and winter squash, gourds, melons, tomatoes and peppers—is also an option.

Grasshoppers have cyclical populations and often increase for a few years before dropping to lower levels, Gharbi and Brant said. But climate change makes that trend more uncertain.

"We're not really sure, because climate change is happening and our ecosystems are changing," Brant said. "While I suspect next year will be more of a typical grasshopper year because that's how their [life cycles](#) go, I can't say that 100% for certain."

Gardeners can take [preventative measures](#) by tilling their soil in the fall to get rid of grasshopper eggs and planting aromatic plants, like catnip or garlic, to keep them away, Brant said.

"Natural remedies are a great way to support the ecosystem and also protect your fruits and vegetables," she said.

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