

EXTENSIVE CHANGES TO THE AIR POTATO BEETLE BIOLOGICAL CONTROL PROGRAM



The air potato beetle biocontrol agents are officially established in the state!

Each year the beetles overwinter through the long vine dormant period and surviving beetles emerge, reproduce and spread throughout the general area each summer. Research shows the beetles have reduced vine coverage, bulbil production, and bulbil size in many parts of the state. Overall this means the beetles are winning against the vine!

Due to the success of the program, the FDACS Division of Plant Industry (DPI), Bureau of Methods Development and Biological Control in Gainesville is now the sole beetle provider. Due to the popularity of the beetles and number of requests, the requestor link was closed in May 2020 to allow the division to provide free beetles to those residents who have already requested them.



The beetle request link has been replaced with a link to **report** the air potato vine. This has several major benefits:

- First, there will be no waiting list that goes from year to year as up to 50 reports per county will be filled each season. This should provide a sufficient influx of insects into each county. Additional reports will be saved as data but will not be kept year to year to select from for beetle distribution.
- Second, it will promote more comprehensive management of the vine by asking residents to wait four to six weeks after vine emergence to report the vines. If beetles return on their own, there is no need for a report because they are established in the area. Mechanical and chemical removal can then compliment the beetles at the appropriate time of the year based on individual infestation levels and personal preferences. See our air potato vine management guide for this information.
- Third, residents will still be able to receive beetles from FDACS. Residents who place reports indicating the presence of the vine and absence of beetles will be selected to receive beetles from FDACS as they are available.

In addition to high public demand and a limited beetle supply, we must use the beetles in a way that is most effective to ensure widespread vine impact and insect establishment. Therefore, we will give priority to infestations that are in or near conservation and preservation areas, and counties where the beetles have not yet established. We will continue to ensure some beetles are sent into every county across the state based off the reports.