

Green Fruit Beetle

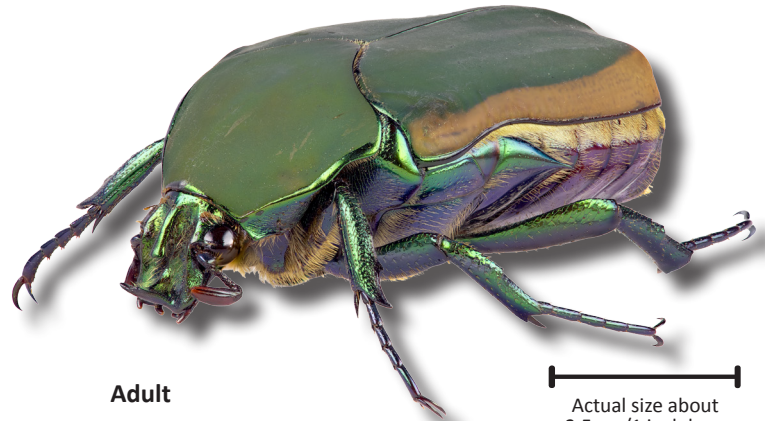
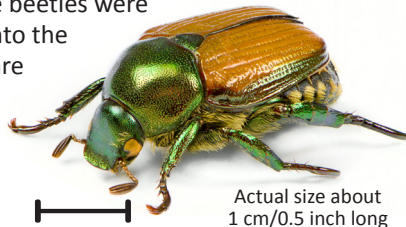
Status

- Interesting
- Harmless
- No health threat
- Potential garden pest
- Eats ripe fruit

The **green fruit beetle** (*Cotinis mutabilis*) is one of the bulkiest beetles in southern California. Adults are typically 2-3 cm (about 1 inch) long and thick-bodied. They are primarily green, with a tan edge to the front wings (elytra). They use the scoop on the front of their head to cut open fruit and then use their chewing mandibles to eat the flesh within. They feed on a wide variety of juicy fruits such as those of cacti, peaches, and figs; on oozing tree sap; and on pollen and nectar of many native plants such as coastal goldenbush. Native to Arizona, New Mexico, and Mexico, they spread to California and by the 1970s became a common sight here. They are sometimes called other names (green peach beetle, fig beetle), based on what they are feeding on when observed.

They are members of the scarab beetle family (Scarabaeidae), known for the scalloped outer edge of their front legs and clubbed antennae that are tipped with leaf-like moveable plates. They are one of the flower chafers, a group within the scarab beetle family that leave their elytra closed on their back and fly only with their hind wings, making them clumsy fliers. They won't bite if held, but the spines near the ends of their legs feels prickly and may irritate people with sensitive hands. Otherwise they are safe to handle and are entertaining to watch.

Green fruit beetles are sometimes mistaken for **Japanese beetles** (*Popillia japonica*), which are much smaller, only 0.8-1.2 cm long, and have a green thorax with brown elytra. Native to Japan, Japanese beetles were accidentally introduced into the eastern U.S. where they are a serious pest in gardens and farms. Japanese beetles *do not* live in Orange County.



Adult

Actual size about
2.5 cm/1 inch long



Pupa

Larva



Larvae are soft-bodied, creme-colored with a dark brown head, 6 short legs, and crawl on their back. They live in decomposing organic matter such as compost piles.

Daily Life

Green fruit beetles are commonly seen flying during warmer months. Their bright color, clumsy flight, and loud buzzing sound always attracts attention.

They sometimes swarm on over-ripe fruit that they locate with their keen sense of smell. Since green fruit beetles eat their fruit, some gardeners and farmers dislike them. To discourage adult beetles, harvest all fruit when ripe; remove fallen fruit immediately. Some types of bird-netting have openings small enough to prevent the beetles from reaching the fruit on the tree.

Larvae in compost piles can be removed manually when the compost is turned during maintenance. Spread compost in thin layers instead of thick piles so larvae cannot hide from birds and other predators. Compost that is flooded for two days will kill eggs and larvae within it. Chemical controls are neither recommended nor needed.

Life Cycle

Green fruit beetles have four stages in their life cycle: **egg**, **larva**, **pupa**, and **adult**. Adult females lay eggs in decomposing organic matter such as compost piles. Days later, larvae hatch from the eggs and feed on organic matter. They have a peculiar habit of lying on their back as they feed. When disturbed, they lie on their side and curl into the shape of the letter "C". As larvae eat and mature, they outgrow their skin, grow a new skin layer beneath it, and shed the old one, a process called **molting**. Following each molt, the larvae are a little larger. Two growth-molt cycles are completed in fall, more in the following spring. When fully grown, larvae are 50 mm (about 2 inches) long and thick. After the last growth-molt cycle, the larva forms a special skin (pupal skin) beneath and sheds the old one, revealing the pupal skin (pupal stage). After weeks or months of development, the adult beetle emerges from the pupal case. The process of changing body forms while maturing is called **metamorphosis**.

