



Pinacate Beetle

Pinacate beetles (*Eleodes* sp.) are a common sight across the American west. These black beetles are members of a larger group called darkling beetles and can be found across Arizona. Adult pinacate beetles range from 0.4 to 1.4 inches long. They can be observed throughout the year avoiding the hottest part of the day in the shelter of animal burrows and under rocks. Pinacate beetles do not fly; they feed on organic debris and are attracted to moist locations.

If you have ever disturbed a pinacate beetle, it probably responded by performing a headstand. It may have also discharged a noxious spray from glands in its abdomen. The compound in the spray is a type of benzoquinone which has an unpleasant odor and can be irritating to the skin, eyes, and mucous membranes. The spray defense works for many potential predators. However, grasshopper mice are known to grab the beetle, force its abdomen into the soil and then proceed to eat the front half of the pinacate beetle. Similarly, scorpions are also known to feed on pinacate beetles by grabbing them with their pincers (pedipalps), pointing the abdomen away, stinging them between body segments, and breaking the beetle apart to eat the soft bits within. It's a jungle out there for pinacate beetles too!

Pinacate beetles are known to feed on Ironwood blossoms, saltbush foliage, and other leaves. They may eat planted vegetable and flower seedlings too. They are usually seen walking around all by themselves mostly minding their own business. There is no reason to be afraid of them if you keep your distance from the tip of the abdomen.

As with any of the larger insects, scorpions, and centipedes, the best strategy to keep them out of your house is to maintain weather stripping, caulk around windows and doors, and maintain window screens.



Pinacate beetle (*Eleodes* sp.) drinking water. Inset: pinacate beetle in a defensive posture. This beetle was 1.3 inches long (Jeff Schalau, University of Arizona).

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Adapted from original Backyard Gardener publications by Jeff Schalau, Agent, Agriculture & Natural Resources, University of Arizona Cooperative Extension, Yavapai County

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