

The Beneficial Ladybug

There are many species of ladybugs, ladybird beetles, or coccinellidae (the beetle family). They are the most commonly known of all beneficial insects. Most Western species are approximately 1/4 inch long, with rounded, shiny wing covers which may be red with black spots, solid orange, brown, yellow or black or there are some species that have no spots at all.

Ladybugs are truly voracious eaters. More than 5,000 aphids may be consumed by a single adult in its lifetime. Both the adult ladybugs and their larvae hunt and feed on soft-bodied insects, with aphids being their main food source. If aphids are in short supply, ladybugs will eat leafhoppers, whiteflies, mealybugs, spider mites, small caterpillars and moth eggs. Some species feed on plant and pollen mildews.



The length of the ladybug life cycle is dependent upon temperature, humidity and the food supply. Generally, the time from egg to adult spans about three to four weeks, but may take up to six weeks during cooler spring months. In early spring, after an overwintering female finds food, she deposits clusters of 10 to 50 tiny yellowish eggs in the midst of aphid colonies. When the eggs hatch in three to five days, the ladybug larvae - which look a bit like miniature alligators - feed on the aphids. After two to three more weeks, the larvae pupate (transform into the nonfeeding stage between larva and adult). Adults emerge in 7 to 10 days. In the fall, the adults will hibernate in crevices and plant refuse.

Limit the use of insecticides within your garden space, to help increase the population of native ladybugs. Ladybugs cause no plant damage, but they have been known to congregate in and around homes. Of course, no insecticide should be used on the beneficial ladybugs, even when they enter your house. Just take ladybugs that get into the house back outside.

Purchasing ladybugs to help control pests in your garden may prove to be an unwise investment as they will often fly away to other locations. Releasing the ladybugs in the cooler temperature of evening may prevent this.

Resources

Editors of Sunset Books and Sunset Magazine, *Western Garden Problem Solver*, Sunset Books, Inc., Menlo Park, CA, 1998.

Featured Creatures: Ladybirds http://creatures.ifas.ufl.edu/beneficial/lady_beetles.htm, retrieved 2/8/2006.

[Lady Beetle](#). Ohio State University Extension Fact Sheet, retrieved 3/8/2006.

Gardening: Insects: Ladybugs: Home & Garden Television http://www.hgtv.com/hgtv/gl_diseases_pests_insects/article/0.1785.HGTV_3580_1398358.00.html, retrieved 2/10/2006.