

Asian Lady Beetles



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The lady beetles that have overrun West Virginia households the past few autumns are members of an exotic species. They were originally introduced into Georgia from Japan in 1977 to control the yellow pecan aphid. Although the species doesn't have an official common name, most entomologists refer to it as the multicolored Asian lady beetle. Unlike the lady beetles to which we are more accustomed, Asian lady beetles gather in large groups for overwintering.

Identification



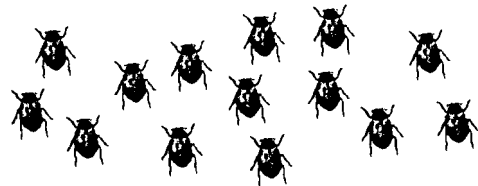
Adults of the multicolored Asian lady beetle, *Harmonia axyridis*, resemble our native lady beetles in size and shape. Oval and convex, the beetles measure 1/4-inch in length and 3/16-inch in width.

Unlike the lady beetles to which we are more accustomed, Asian lady beetles gather in large groups for overwintering.

The normal color is a pumpkinlike yellow-orange with black spots. This, together with their appearance around the end of October, has earned them the nickname Halloween lady beetles. They usually have 19 spots, but this number can vary, with some individuals having fewer or even no spots.

Biology and Habits

The yellow, oval-shaped eggs are laid in clusters of 20 on the undersides of leaves, where they hatch in 3 to 5 days. The elongate, spiny larvae that emerge from the eggs feed on aphids and scale insects for 12 to 14 days. The entire life cycle from egg to adult requires slightly more than a month. Adult beetles overwinter unmated; they mate upon emerging from hibernation in the spring.



In their native Japan, the beetles hibernate in cracks and crevices on the sides of cliffs, clustered by the thousands. Here in America, they seem to have adopted houses as the next best thing. White or light-colored houses in wooded areas are preferred, with clusters gathering on the west or southwest sides on sunny days. They are adept at finding tiny cracks and crevices. Indoors, they tend to cluster in the corners of ceilings, often in groups of 1,000 or more.

Multicolored Asian lady beetles are not poisonous or otherwise harmful to humans, pets, or property. They do not reproduce indoors. However, the mere presence of such large numbers inside homes can be a major nuisance.

Outdoors during the growing season, Asian lady beetles are quite beneficial. As predators of aphids associated with trees, shrubs, ornamental plants, and some agricultural crops, they are reported to be better than our native lady beetles at tracking down aphids.

Prevention Methods

As is often characteristic of exotic species introduced into a new habitat with plenty of food and few natural enemies, the Asian lady beetles' population has exploded, with four or five generations produced in a single year.

Since the Asian lady beetle is so beneficial, using pesticide sprays to kill them is not suggested.

Weather conditions also may favor high populations, since large numbers of lady beetles can result from a cool summer with plentiful vegetation and large numbers of aphids.

Eventually the populations should be reduced by natural enemies and should stabilize at lower levels. For now, there's not much we can do but try to keep them

outside and value them for their aphid-eating ability.

Control Strategies

Since the Asian lady beetle is so beneficial, using pesticide sprays to kill them is not suggested. Recommended controls include simply preventing their entry by caulking cracks around windows, doors, utility pipes, and siding and by installing 20-mesh or finer screen over attic and exhaust vents. Pay special attention to windows and lighting fixtures since the beetles are attracted to light.

Outdoors during the growing season, Asian lady beetles are quite beneficial.

Use a broom and dustpan or a vacuum cleaner to remove those that do manage to make their way indoors. Release them outside well away from homes. They may return the favor next summer by eating harmful aphids on your plants.

Another suggestion is simply to be patient. Reports indicate that the beetles, after settling down on the sides of houses, often leave on their own in a few days or weeks.

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Charles G. Morris, Interim Director, Cooperative Extension Service, West Virginia University.
