

New Lady Beetle May Enter Homes

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Lady beetle, lady beetle fly away home.” This is the first line of a rhyme that many children learn and say during childhood. Many homeowners may want to change this line to “Lady beetle, lady beetle fly away from my home” as a non-native lady beetle species begins to fly onto and into their homes this fall and early winter.

Lady beetles, sometimes called ladybugs or ladybird beetles, are among the most recognizable insects. They are considered to be good bugs, or beneficial insects, because they are natural enemies of many of our plant pests. The typical lady beetle is orange with black spots; however, these beetles come in many colors including red, brown or black and often lack spots.

Mike Donahoe, University of Florida Extension Agent and Director of the Santa Rosa County Extension Office, describes the history and habits of an introduced lady beetle and explains why it was brought to the U.S. in today’s garden article.

In the 1980s USDA entomologists imported and released a new lady beetle from Japan to combat aphids that infest pecan trees. This lady beetle, *Harmonia axyridis*, also called the multicolored Asian lady beetle or Halloween beetle, is typically orange-red with 19 black spots. Some of these beetles are either without spots or may only have traces of 4 to 6 spots. They all have a black “W” on the white area just behind the head.

Research has shown that Asian lady beetles are voracious predators of aphids common to Florida crops. In fact, they are much more aggressive aphid-eaters than our native species. An adult is capable of consuming up to 270 aphids per day and each larva can consume 600 to 1,200 aphids during its development.

The introduction of the Asian lady beetle was so successful that by 1994 it colonized the U.S. from Florida to Canada and from coast to coast. Despite the fact it is an effective biological control agent in agricultural and landscape environments, in some areas it has become a major nuisance to homeowners. Like many of our native lady beetle species, the Asian lady beetle adults aggregate in high numbers to over-winter. Flight to over-wintering quarters is triggered by the onset of cold weather, usually November-December in north Florida. Light colored buildings that receive direct sunlight in the afternoon are preferred gathering sites. After congregating they then seek winter shelter inside by crawling through cracks, gaps or ventilation openings.

The Asian lady beetle appears to be very abundant this year and is currently found in high numbers on pecan and crape myrtle where aphids are present. Prevention is the best technique for managing problems with these beetles. Carefully seal cracks and openings around windows, doors, siding and utility pipes with a quality caulk.

Also, repair door and window screens or other openings to the outdoors. If beetles

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still gain entry into living spaces, they should be removed using a broom and dustpan, or vacuum cleaner, and released outdoors. Once they are inside a building, a black-light trap will capture and remove them at night. Pesticides should not be used unless absolutely necessary.

Despite their over-wintering behavior, the Asian lady beetle is a very valuable natural enemy of many insect pests and should be tolerated and conserved when possible. Fortunately, they are not poisonous, do not bite or sting, are not carriers of disease and do not eat wood. However, if alarmed, they may discharge a yellow fluid that can stain walls, paint, and fabrics, and has an unpleasant odor.

If you need information on this or other topics, please feel free to call your local County Extension Office. Larry Williams is the Horticulture Extension Agent for University of Florida IFAS Extension in Okaloosa County.

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