

Lady beetles (many species)

Identification

The adults are oval, rounded beetles, with more than 500 species known to occur in the United States and Canada. They vary in length between 4 to 10 mm and display a variety of colours, including black, red, orange-red, and yellow. Many species have a characteristic wing color and number of black spots on their wings, but other species show a large variation in color and number of spots.



Above Left: Lady beetle collection with size comparison to a paperclip.

Above Right: Lady beetle larvae and pupae on leaf undersides.

The larvae have an alligator-like shape. At first they are black with short hairs and spines on their backs, and well-developed legs. The later instars are grey to blue-grey with orange markings. Pupae are often found hanging from leaves and bark and are orange-red with black markings.

Lady beetles are also called “lady bugs” and “ladybird beetles”.



Above Left: Lady beetle larvae with rosy aphids.

Above Right: Ladybeetle eggs on underside of leaf.

Preferred food

Both adults and larvae feed on aphids, spider mites, scales and mealybugs. The adults chew the body parts and can eat up to 3,000 aphids in their lifespan. Full-grown larvae can suck the body fluids of approximately fifty aphids per day. When prey is in short supply, the adults can survive on pollen and nectar for a short period of time.

Life cycle

Lady beetles overwinter as adults and emerge early in the spring. An adult female will lay 10 to 50 yellow to orange elongated eggs in a cluster, often on the underside of a leaf. The time span from egg to adult is usually 20 to 35 days. The adults can live one to two months and under ideal outdoor conditions, there may be up to six generations per year.

Status in ornamental plants

The lady beetle adult is the first predator of the season and can be seen in early April. They can multiply to large numbers in a short time and continue to forage for aphids all through the summer. The public easily recognizes this predator.

Nursery and landscape managers should learn to recognize the larval stage of lady beetles. The alligator-shape, blue to black with orange markings, is typical of this predator. There are many situations where toxic pesticides are applied to control “the bugs” that turn out to be lady beetle larvae.

Different species are available from insectaries for commercial release. The species collected in the mountains of California often fly away from the point of release before searching for food, making them less useful in open areas. Recently, the Asian lady beetle became available through some suppliers and is said to remain at the site of release.