

School-to-Nature



U.S. Ladybug, classic 7 spots



Ladybug

(Also called Ladybird Beetle or Lady Beetle)

Ladybugs are common in our area during warm weather and can be found on all Conservancy landscapes. Both males and females are called Ladybug. During the growing season, the female lays her eggs on the underside of a leaf where there are aphids or other plant pests for the hatching babies to eat, as in the photo to the right of an Asian Lady Beetle. In winter, Ladybugs hibernate in groups, in crevices in bark, and in door and window frames.

Ladybugs are about ¼ inch long, and they actually have two types of wings: they have a hard outer pair of wings that forms a protective shell, and softer inner wings for flying. You can see both in the third photo above.

The Ladybug's name is religious in origin. In ancient times farmers prayed to Mary, the mother of Jesus, when pests were eating their crops. The "Lady's" bugs arrived and ate all the damaging insects, and so the name stuck. Ladybugs often have seven spots, which were thought to represent the Seven Sorrows of Mary as written in the Bible. Finally, the Ladybug's red color was thought to be the same as the red cloak that Mary wears in some religious paintings. An example is at the left.



In the 1880s farmers used Ladybugs the insects destroying the orange crops. Ladybugs are still used to control the aphid, white fly, and mite population on many farms. In the 1980s the Asian or Harlequin Lady Beetle (very similar in looks) was brought to the U.S. It helped cause a decline of the aphid population, but also caused the decline in the population of other aphid eating insects, including the U.S. Ladybug species. Both species can have from zero to 20 black spots, so it is difficult to tell them apart only by counting spots.

Ladybugs are found anywhere plant pests like aphids might be: on flowers, shrub and tree leaves, and on growing vegetables and fruits. If you find one, let it remain safely where it is, because it is protecting all the growing things you see.

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Asian Lady Beetle laying eggs