

News Article
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Lady Beetle Home Invasion

Recently I have had numerous calls and questions concerning lady beetles invading homes. They seem to have appeared overnight and in some cases in huge numbers.

Lady beetles, or ladybugs as they are often called, are normally considered beneficial insects because they feed on pest insects such as aphids in gardens and landscapes. However, the multicolored Asian lady beetle, *Harmonia axyridis*, can become a serious household pest. These beetles have been reported to congregate on the sides of buildings by the thousands. They will move inside if given the opportunity, and will stain carpeting, wallpaper, and bedding when crushed or disturbed. These beetles are not poisonous, do not sting, are not carriers of disease, and do not eat wood.

The Asian lady beetle was originally released as a biological control agent for pecan aphids as early as 1916 in California. They have been used throughout the United States and in Canada. Asian lady beetles have a wide host range and can feed on aphids infesting rose, apple, poplar, conifers, and crape myrtles.

The beetles seem to be attracted to light, reflective surfaces such as large windows, or light-colored walls and trim. Beetles usually are found on the sunniest areas of buildings. Homes in forested areas are prone to infestation because the beetles normally lives on trees.

In Japan, Asian lady beetles overwinter in the cracks and crevices of mountain rocks. In the United States, they use buildings as protection from winter. The beetles begin to invade homes through cracks and crevices during the fall (around October or November in Alabama). People with log homes may find this beetle particularly troublesome due to the beetles' preference to dwell in cracks and crevices. Common overwintering sites include door and window frames, porches, underneath siding, roof shingles, wall voids, and attics.

Control methods include exclusion, sanitation, and chemical techniques. Prevention is the key to keeping this lady beetle from getting into homes. A space less than 1/8 inch will allow lady beetles entry. To prevent entry, caulk cracks along windows, doors, or other portals of entry. Also seal or screen attic vents and install tight fitting door sweeps. Gaps under glass sliding doors may be sealed with foam weather stripping.

Vacuuming is the first line of defense once they are in the home. Don't forget to discard the vacuum bag outside when you are finished. Do not crush the beetles as they can stain wallpaper and upholstery.

Chemicals are generally not recommended. The beetles have to be sprayed directly or walk over treated surfaces to obtain a toxic dose. A vacuum cleaner eliminates beetles indoors without leaving pesticide residues on indoor walls and countertops.

A limited use of insecticides indoors may be warranted in local areas of heavy infestation. Be specific in your treatment and always follow the directions on the label. Insecticides containing synthetic pyrethroids such as permethrin, lambda- cyhalothrin, cypermethrin, cyfluthrin, or deltamethrin are fast knock-down insecticides. Read the label for the active ingredient.

In short, lady beetles are beneficial insects that eat other insect pests such as aphids. However the Asian lady beetle has a habit of invading homes making it a temporary pest itself. And although they can produce a small bite, they are not dangerous or damaging to homes (except for staining on some surfaces). They will all be gone when the weather gets cold.