

# Live Free and Dig

with the Littleton Garden Club

## Ladybug Ladybug

BY MARY BINGMAN

Littleton Garden Club

Not the 1963 cold war docudrama film called "Ladybug Ladybug." I'm pondering colorful ladybugs swarming the southern side of buildings in the fall. They soak up sun rays in large numbers. A late fall afternoon at the top of Mt. Prospect (Weeks State Park), there were multitudes of them on the upper porches and stairs of the estate enjoying the warmth of the afternoon.

Curious to understand more about this autumn occurrence, I read extension service articles and looked at related garden websites. The first thing I noticed is there are many superstitions. It was believed that ladybugs provide good luck and can predict winter weather. No significance actually exists between their numbers and the upcoming winter forecast.

As temperatures cool in Autumn, they seek out warm, sunny surfaces (such as southern facing

windows) and look for places to winter over. In fact, if there is a tiny opening around a window or door, they might find their way in and seem to invite all of their relatives.

Ladybugs are getting the last bit of warmth and mean no harm. Ladybugs are good garden visitors. They feed on insect eggs, small worms, aphids, and other pests. The trick is to know the difference between the good American ladybug and the pesky Asian Lady beetle.

There are two very similar beetles that appear ladybug like. Both look a lot alike and behave similarly at first glance. There are a few ways to tell them apart.

The Asian Lady Beetle has a distinctive white "W" shape on the area between the head and body. This area is known as the pronotum which is a protective plate covering delicate wings and legs beneath. Their bodies are usually orange or yellowish with black spots.

The American Ladybug has a shiny black pronotum with two tiny white circles. Bodies are a dark red with black spots.

Here are the main differences between the two types:

1. Ladybugs are small while the Asian beetle is slightly larger.

2. Ladybugs are red in color with black spots. Asian beetles range from orange to red.

3. Ladybugs live in grasslands, forests and towns. Asian beetles live on trees and in fields.

4. Ladybugs are round or oval. The Asian ones are longer and the head or snout is pointed.

5. Ladybugs generally do not sneak into homes while the Asian beetles may sneak into houses or businesses.

One of the 400 species of lady bugs is known as the Convergent lady beetle and it is significant in pest control.

Convergent Lady Beetles are native to the U.S. and have been distribut-

ed from Canada to South America. The white lines at the top of the thorax identifies them along with the bright red to orange red coloration. They can have from 0 to 12 black spots.

This species is the best general predator in organic gardens and greenhouses. They can support a backyard ecosystem and they can defeat the bad bugs damaging plants if enough of them hang around to feed. The downside is that some of them fly away.

I am happy to see ladybugs around when I have an aphid problem in the garden (usually on my hanging annuals that I have in baskets). La-

dybugs love feasting on those tiny pests.

Interesting to note that female ladybugs can lay over 1,000 eggs in a lifetime. They cleverly protect themselves against predators by manufacturing a chemical that tastes bad to other bugs. Also, they hibernate during cold temperatures. Amazingly they can survive on their stored fat which is primarily from pollen.

Ladybugs have sometimes been called "ladybirds" through history. Back in 1674, the word "ladybird" was noted in the Oxford dictionary. It made reference to a "little spotted beetle commonly referred to as "ladybird." Maybe the "bird" part of

the name simply refers to the insect's winged nature and flying abilities, but "Lady," refers to the Virgin Mary. The legend says that in the Middle Ages, farmers were worried that their crops would be destroyed by insects, so they prayed to the Virgin Mary for help.

Even though the snow is falling steadily - it's fun to think about the days when ladybugs will return. I look forward to seeing them in the garden or when sunning away on a late fall day in New England.

For more information about our club or our meetings visit: <https://www.littletonnhgardenclub.org/>.

## INSURANCE

[www.bestinsurance.net](http://www.bestinsurance.net)

Home • Auto  
Trucks • Business  
Motorcycles



Hadlock  
Insurance

EASY PAYMENTS