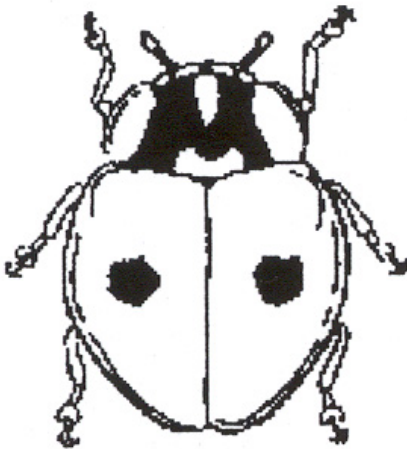


## Lady Beetles in Homes

(Family: Coccinellidae)



**Two-spotted  
Lady Beetle**

**Description and Problem.** Lady beetles, also commonly known as lady bugs or ladybird beetles, frequently become a nuisance in homes during the winter and early spring. They are the familiar small, hemispherical beetles generally reddish-orange, tan or yellow usually with black spots. The two-spotted lady beetle, *Adalia bipunctata*, is a common species in this area. It is orange-red in color with one black spot on each wing cover. Since 1994, the Multicolored Asian Lady Beetle (*Harmonia axyridis*) has been a nuisance pest in homes and buildings. (See page 2 for *Asian Ladybird Beetle*.)

In the fall the adult beetles congregate in protected spots to hibernate over the winter. In many cases they find their way into the home for this purpose. Normally the beetles remain inactive throughout the cold winter months living on stored fat. However, in the home they may be warmed sufficiently to become active. When this happens they are attracted to windows and doors, especially those on the sunny side of the house in an attempt to get outside. The number of beetles increases with the return of warmer temperatures in the spring and during warm, sunny periods in the winter. They do not cause damage to foodstuffs or plants in the home. The beetles leave a yellow stain on hands or fabrics if crushed or disturbed.

Ladybugs are beneficial insects important in the biological control of several serious insect pests. Both the adult beetles and larvae feed upon aphids, scale insects and mealybugs that are serious pests of trees, vegetables and flowers. Several species of ladybugs are collected and sold to growers for control of insect pests. They play an important role in insect pest management.

The use of insecticides for controlling lady beetles indoors is NOT recommended. Preventing their entry in the first place is the best way to manage lady beetles. Seal cracks and openings around windows, doors, openings in siding and around utility pipes with caulk or silicone. They may be easily collected with a vacuum cleaner or gently swept up and disposed of out of doors. Be sure to empty the bag after vacuuming up insects (or they may come out in the storage closet). Sweep gently to avoid alarming beetles and causing them to discharge a yellow fluid that may show on fabric and wall surfaces. The beetles will disperse outside when warmer temperatures return in the spring in search of prey and egg laying sites. They should no longer be a problem in the household during the summer.

# Asian Ladybird Beetle

Large numbers of Asian Ladybird Beetles or ladybugs are being found in and around our homes. They first appeared in New York State and the Town of Erin in Chemung County, in 1994. Normally, ladybugs are considered beneficial because they eat aphids, scale, and other small insects. In the fall, large numbers of this ladybug beetle congregate on the sides of homes, offices, and other buildings. In some cases, large numbers of the beetles gain entry through cracks and openings into attics, soffits, wall voids, window and door casings, and similar areas. Unlike the Ladybird beetles preceding the Asian one, they are solitary hibernators. The Asian one is gregarious; it clusters for the winter.

Why are they such a problem? During the period of 1978 to 1982, the USDA released large numbers of the multi-colored Asian Lady Beetle (*Harmonia axyridis*) to deal with aphid problems in the Eastern United States. The lady beetles disappeared, and the experiment was thought to be a failure.

This beetle started showing up in large numbers several years after that. It spread up the Atlantic coast, into the Southeast, and through the Midwest. The lady beetles (or ladybugs, terms used interchangeably) are so numerous because they have been doing a great job attacking aphids. The last several years have shown ideal weather conditions for aphids; also, there has been a decrease in the amount of pesticides used. The lady beetles have been munching on aphids in alfalfa and field crops, home gardens, and city trees.

The reason these ladybugs have become a problem is because of their home habitat. These Japanese lady beetles join together in friendly colonies of thousands of individuals to hibernate over winter in the crevices of cliffs and rocky hillsides. Without cliffs, they look for outbuildings and homes.

In the fall, they congregate on the south and west sides of light colored buildings, with a seeming preference for clapboard siding. As experienced crevice finders, they find their way through tiny cracks into the walls, around the windows, into attic

areas, and so on. Then, as winter advances, warm days bring them out exploring. Unfortunately, they explore in the wrong direction...inside our homes. They come out in the hundreds, sometimes covering large sections of walls or ceilings.

Lady beetles do not bite, sting, spread disease, infest food, or damage clothing or wood. They will leave a slimy smear behind them, especially if they are harassed. They also have a distinct odor when squashed. People, however, become somewhat annoyed when they start seeing hundreds of these critters where no insect should ever be seen, indoors.

These ladybugs have also been confused with a number of other insects that are attracted to homes in the fall, including elm leaf beetles, boxelder bugs and conifer seed bugs. The Asian lady beetles are very variable, and some don't look quite like ladybugs. Generally, they are yellow to yellow-orange. The wing covers may have as many as 19 black spots, none at all or any number between.

The best recommendation for controlling these beneficial pests is vacuuming them up as you see them inside. Dump the vacuum bag outside after you are finished. Make sure that they can't get into the house by sealing windows and doors, keeping screens in good repair, and caulking all cracks. Insecticides are not recommended, because, like it or not, these ladybugs are beneficial. If we spray them, we will probably see more aphid problems in the future.

Will they continue to be a problem? According to one Extension researcher, populations vary with time. They normally expect 4 to 5 years of a population explosion, and then the population crashes. This could be caused by lack of food (not hardly as aphids are their food source), or by some disease or parasite attacking the population. Some researchers believe we may have several high population years before the population stabilizes. We will probably always have some small number of ladybugs attracted to our homes in the fall, but hopefully, we will not get the multitudes we are currently.