

Asian Lady Beetle Is Beneficial Pest, But Not In The House



DR. DOUGLAS B. JONES

MT. VERNON, ILL.

Since this is my first column in Mid-America Farmer Grower, let me begin with a short introduction. I graduated from Henderson State University, Arkansas, way back in 1983 and jumped straight into agriculture by building and operating 13,000 square feet of greenhouses in addition to managing a small cow-calf operation in southwest Arkansas. Later, I accepted a position with the University of Arkansas as a research specialist, working on imported fire ants in southeast Arkansas. Deciding that entomology was my path for the future, I enrolled at Oklahoma State University where I received a M.S. and Ph.D. After a short post-doc at OSU, I came to Illinois where I now work as the integrated pest management specialist in Mt. Vernon. Additionally, I serve as an Extension associate with the National Soybean Research Laboratory in Urbana, Illinois. With that, let me say that I am pleased to serve you as a contributing columnist.

During the coming year, my column will focus on a "pest of the month" to discuss pests that you may be seeing. Since it is February, there are not too many insect pests operating out there. So, let's start out with one that is typically considered beneficial, but when it gets into your house, it can be a real pest.

The multicolored Asian lady beetle, *Harmonia axyridis*, first entered this country through releases made as far back as 1910. More recently, the USDA made releases in the late 1970s in an attempt to help suppress aphids that were

plaguing pecan farmers. Other accounts have the beetle entering the country through different means. Regardless of the entry method, multicolored Asian lady beetles, aka Japanese lady beetle or the Halloween beetle, have become established throughout much of the country. They eat many species of aphids and scale insects, including the soybean aphid, which can save farmers money by reducing the need for aphid control.

However, they are also considered a pest species, especially by grape and other tender fruit growers. One beetle mixed into the grape juice used for a bottle of wine will ruin the flavor.

Additionally, the adult beetles look for places to overwinter each fall. In their ancestral home back in Asia, beetles would seek caves (typically in limestone cliffs) in which to overwinter. Caves are in shorter supply in southern Illinois so they seek the next best thing, our homes. Once inside, they settle into corners and crevasses. On warm days, they can "wake up" and fly around the house, becoming a nuisance. Pick one up and the smell it exudes is quite noxious. This is due to a phenomenon called reflex bleeding. They can bleed from their joints at will. The hemolymph (blood) they exude is a toxic-smelling concoction that helps protect them from being eaten. Home owners can control entry into the house by having tight-fitting screens, caulking cracks and painting the house a non-white color, and by vacuuming up the beetles that do enter the house in spite of exclusionary tactics.

△

Dr. Douglas B. Jones Ph.D., is Extension Specialist, Integrated Pest Management, with the University of Illinois at the Mt. Vernon Extension Center.