

Where Are The Lady Beetles This Year?



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Midwestern residents have looked forward to this time of the year when the lady beetles swarm their homes and move inside to torment us throughout the winter. This year in areas south of St Louis there shouldn't be too many beetles looking to move into our homes. This is largely due to the high heat and scarcity of moisture in the later summer months. Due to these conditions there has been little for the prey of the beetle to feed on and as such fewer lady beetles were produced.

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. Δ

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