
SUNNYSIDE THYMES

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Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?

SMG Education Committee

Look who's coming to dinner, maybe staying for the winter! The Lady Beetle, Ladybug, or Lady Bird Beetles.

Lady beetles (coccinellidae) are generally a good visitor to your garden. They are a large family with 400 coccinellid species in North America and 5000 species worldwide. The dinner selections of both the larvae and adults are aphids, spider mites, thrips, scales, and small caterpillars. The ladybugs can be the most abundant predator in a milkweed community.

Our lady beetle visitors are oval to round in shape with a strong convex on top and nearly flat bottom. Their head can be partially or completely hidden under a plate that covers their thorax. They come “dressed for dinner” in a variety of colors. They may be in bright red, orange, or yellow as well as black. Their spots come in a broad range in the size, number of spots, and patterns.

The ladybug beetles lay bright yellow eggs on leaves near their prey. Even the larvae are active predators. The larvae are spindle-shaped with spines, spots, and bands. Some produce waxy filaments. The unique larvae that is found below ground is that of the orange-spotted lady beetle. They reside in ant nests and eat scale insects.

Lady Beetles have been brought to the United States both intentionally and unintentionally. Part of the first successful biological control project, the vedalia beetle, was imported in the late 1800's. They were used to control cottony cushion scale, which was a devastating citrus pest. It was a very good dinner guest as it was very effective. It is still dining and foraging in trees for pests.



Some of our imported guests are very common in all or part of the United States. Some of the most common visitors are the seven-spot lady beetles, multi colored Asian lady beetle, checkerspot lady beetle, and the variegated lady beetle. While these exotic lady beetles do dine on pests in our gardens, their establishment also coincides with a decline of several species of our native lady beetles. We are seeing fewer of the nine-spotted lady beetle, two-spotted lady beetle, and convergent lady beetle. Overstaying their welcome, the multicolored Asian Lady beetle will seek to shelter from the winter in our warm houses. These Asian Lady beetles are one of the recently introduced species of lady beetles.

So save a place at the garden table for the ladybug beetles!

(Information taken from both Good Garden Bugs by Mary M. Gardiner, Ph.D. and Milkweed, Monarchs and More by Ba Rea, Karen Oberhauser, and Michael A. Quinn)
