

Bluestem Breezes
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Lady Beetles Invade Homes

Lady beetles (traditionally referred to as lady bugs) seem to be in our eyesight a lot lately. As I started writing this week's column, I remembered this very topic from a few years ago. But, how time flies! This column comes from November of 2008. While the text was written five years ago, the information is still relevant. Please read on for those of you dealing with what seems to have become your 'BFF', the lady beetle.

As cooler weather sets in, one annual insect migration that gets people's attention is that of the Multicolored Asian Ladybeetle, often referred to as ladybugs.

"These beetles were introduced into the U.S. by the USDA in the 1970s and '80s to help control aphids," said Kansas State University Research and Extension entomologist Jeff Whitworth. "They are very good at this and usually are found in trees and shrubs feasting on these little pests."

They will, however, feed on other aphid species and in 2004 migrated to soybean fields where they found a ready supply of soybean aphids, he said. Since then, soybean aphid populations have been minimal, but this year, populations increased again. Similarly, the ladybeetle population has grown. Thus, home invasions by these beetles may be expected in the next four to six weeks as they are seeking overwintering sites.

"Multicolored Asian Lady Beetles overwinter as adults in protected areas including homes and barns," Whitworth said. "They may invade a suitable site by the thousands and can be a real nuisance. Since they are predators they do have chewing mouthparts and can bite."

The bites are harmless, but can be a nuisance, Whitworth added. These beetles are beneficial in helping to control aphids and other pests, so there are no pesticides labeled for lady beetle control.

"The best way to keep lady beetles from invading your dwelling this fall is to start by sealing all cracks around windows, doors, and other openings to the outdoors and make sure your screens are tight-fitting," he said. "If invasions occur, and you'll notice when beetles start gathering on the south or west side of your home in the afternoon, it is best to sweep them up with a broom or vacuum and remove them a considerable distance - or they may just quickly return."

Other helpful tips:

- Lady beetles emit a yellow-orange liquid capable of staining walls and home furnishings.
- They are attracted to light-colored buildings and areas of direct sunlight.
- While insecticides may be used around the home's perimeter, the most effective method is still to vacuum and remove those beetles who found their way indoors.

- Large indoor concentrations of lady beetles may increase allergic reactions such as asthma.

Further information on controlling those insects that invade your home is available by visiting the Extension Office (215 Kansas, Courthouse, Alma; kamayer@ksu.edu; 765-3821). For Bluestem Breezes archives, check out wabaunsee.ksu.edu.