

Beneficial Lady Beetles, Not So Lady-Like

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By now, you've noticed them in your house and car, or you've heard someone talking about orange-colored "ladybugs" that are seemingly mounting a silent invasion. At first encounter, you might think "Oh, look! What is that cute lady bug doing in my house? I'll just relocate you to my plants outside." Unfortunately for many, the pleasant thoughts stopped at that point because these particular beetles have the potential to smell terrible, stain surfaces, and even bite humans.

The insect in question here is known as the Multicolored Asian lady beetle. Just as we all remember from grade school, this lady beetle is beneficial in the landscape, eating aphids and other small insects that damage plants. As the name implies, this beetle is not native to the US, but rather, was introduced from eastern Asia on purpose as a biological control for pecan aphids as early as 1916 according to University of Minnesota Extension. From 1964 to 1982, additional Multicolored Asian lady beetles were released in 10 different states including Louisiana, but not Texas. It is safe to say that these releases did have some positive impact, as the beetles are documented as important predators of aphids on various agricultural crops.

Individuals closely resemble other lady beetles, but tend to be slightly larger, and their color and markings can vary. The typical beetle is a rusty orange color (ranges from yellow to red) and can have up to 19 black spots, although some may have no spots at all.

In the days following near-freezing temperatures, the beetles begin to search for protected places to spend the winter. In their native Asian habitat, cliffs and rocky outcroppings provided a sheltered spot to overwinter. Since south Texas lacks these features, beetles substitute with sunny sides of light-colored buildings. They seem to be particularly attracted to buildings that have contrasting light and dark colors. The beetles then squeeze themselves into cracks around doors and roof lines, entering attics and wall voids. Some will find their way into the living area, but most tend to form large living masses in walls and attics. With this in mind, it is imperative to seal cracks and openings, even as small as 1/8 inch. The application of insecticides at this point is futile, unnecessary, and irresponsible, especially indoors.

Take care when removing the beetles. Although rare, some can bite hard enough to break human skin causing minor discomfort, although this is rare. Additionally, they can secrete a foul-smelling yellow liquid from the joints in their legs. Not only does the liquid smell badly, but has the potential to stain light-colored surfaces like ceiling tiles, curtains, or carpet.

One picture on social media purports to show a number of the beetles stuck to the ridges on the roof of a dog's mouth. There are a few reports of this across the country, but should not be viewed as normal, as the beetles are definitely not seeking-out dogs, nor will they harm the dog beyond some minor

discomfort and a loss of appetite. Local veterinary offices have not had any cases of lady beetles bothering animals. It is likely that the beetles get inside a dog's mouth due to the dog's own curiosity.

Ohio State University Extension recommends removing the beetles with a vacuum. To prevent staining and disturbance of beetles, homeowners may wish to insert a nylon stocking into the extension wand of the vacuum cleaner. Secure the open end of the stocking with a rubber band, allowing the closed end to be pulled into the hose, thereby trapping the beetles.

For more information, give us a call: 732-2082.

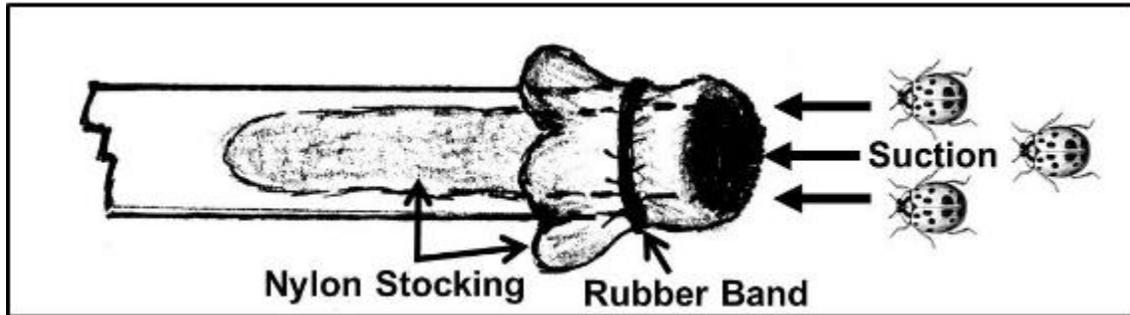


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