

THE LADYBUGS ARE COMING!

It's that time of year again when the ladybugs will start invading our homes!! There is still time to take action to reduce the numbers of these critters that will annoy you in your house this coming winter and spring!

The Multicolored Asian Ladybeetle, *Harmonia axyridis*, has only been in Wisconsin since about 1994, but in the last few years, it has made quite a nuisance of itself here in western Wisconsin. While similar to our native ladybeetle, this variety is a bit bigger and comes in a variety of colors, including pale orange, dark orange, red and yellowish. The number of black spots can vary from none to 19, and in Asia, these beetles occur in at least 100 different color forms, including black with orange spots.

During the summer, these beetles and their larva are pretty invisible out in our landscapes, doing us a wonderful favor by eating aphids and scale pests that attack our plants. As the weather turns cooler in fall, however, they begin looking for a place to settle in for the winter. Unfortunately for us, they find our homes to be a cozy, comfortable place to sleep—rent free--until spring!

Asian ladybeetles can congregate by the thousands on the sides of building and if given the opportunity, they will move inside to spend the winter. The best defense against living with these unwanted houseguests is to prevent them from entering your house in the first place.

The beetles usually can be found on the west and southwest walls of your house, sunning themselves in warm fall sunshine. When the sun goes down, however, they crawl into any cracks and crevices they can find, for protection from the cold winds of winter.

There is still time to grab a caulk gun and seal up the openings these insects find into your house. Take an "insect's eye view" of your house and you will find a variety of places where these tiny critters can enter.

Install door sweeps or thresholds at the base of all exterior entry doors. Lay on the floor and look for light filtering under doors. Gaps on the edges of 1/16 inch or less is enough for insects to get through. Apply caulk along the bottom outside edge and sides of door thresholds to exclude insects. Gaps under sliding glass doors can be sealed by lining the bottom track with ½ to 2/3 inch-wide foam weather stripping. Also be sure to repair any gaps and tears in window and door screens.

Seal utility openings where pipes and wires enter the foundation or siding. Check around outdoor faucets, gas meters, dryer vents, and telephone/cable wires. These are common entry points for pests. Plug holes with caulk, expandable urethane foam, or some other method.

Caulk cracks around windows, doors, fascia boards, attic vents, etc. Use a good quality silicone or acrylic latex caulk. Be sure to also caulk or fill gaps where the siding and the foundation meet. This is a common opening, as the siding may not be flush with the foundation. Even new houses can have caulk shrink and create openings large enough for ladybeetles and other insects to get through.

If the beetles cannot be excluded from entering the building, you can try using some pesticide sprays around the outside of the building during late September and early October to attempt to kill or repel some of the beetles. Most effective are synthetic pyrethroids such as permethrin, cypermethrin, cyfluthrin, deltamethrin and lambda-cyhalothrin. Concentrate along

doors, windows and overhangs on the south, west and east sides of the structure. It will take a lot of spray to get thorough coverage, and it will not be 100% effective.

When all else fails, a vacuum cleaner or broom is often the best response once the beetles have found their way indoors. Keep in mind that they are relatively harmless. They will not lay eggs or multiply in your house, and they do not eat carpets, fabrics, wood, or people!! While they may pinch if startled after landing on you, they have no venom like mosquitoes or bees have. However, some people have reported allergic reactions to contact with these beetles.

Pesticides are not recommended for control of Asian ladybeetles once they are in your house. The insects typically sleep away the winter between the walls, and when warm spring weather comes, they become active and often crawl into the living areas. Once the insects are in the walls, pesticides will not be effective, so it is very important to seal up entry points into your house and keep them from getting in. When the insects crawl out into your living area, it is just as easy to suck them up into the vacuum cleaner as it is to spray a pesticide.

A UW-Extension fact sheet on the Asian lady beetle can be found at <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/wihort/gardenfacts/X1050.pdf>, or from your county UW-Extension office. For more information on this and other insect pests, see the web site of the UW-Extension Horticulture Team at <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/wihort/>.