

***"Ladybug, ladybug fly away home.
Your house is on fire and your children are gone.
All except one, and her name is Anne.
And she crept under the frying pan."***

From nursery rhymes to worldwide symbols of good luck, ladybugs are the most well-known beneficial insect in the garden. Ladybugs are actually beetles, which is why they are sometimes referred to as lady beetles. Ladybugs eat aphids, scale, and other small, soft-bodied insects, mites, and insect eggs making them a powerhouse of protection for your garden. One ladybug can eat up to 5,000 insects in its lifetime. Female ladybugs will lay their eggs on leaves covered in aphids so when their larvae hatch, they have an automatic buffet at the ready. A single ladybug larvae may consume several hundred aphids in the two weeks it takes them to fully grow. The types of beneficial ladybugs specific to Oklahoma are the nine-spotted lady beetle, convergent lady beetle, seven-spot lady beetle, and the transverse ladybug.

Ladybugs in Oklahoma become active in the spring and summer months. You can help protect those overwintering in leaf litter in your garden by waiting until April to clean away debris, as they typically emerge as temperatures warm and food sources like aphids become more plentiful. During the growing season, ladybugs can be seen crawling along plant stems and leaves, often in search of prey.

As fall approaches and temperatures drop, ladybugs begin to seek out sheltered spots for overwintering. In nature, they often gather in large groups under bark, inside logs, or within leaf litter. However, the non-native Asian lady beetle has developed a habit of entering homes and

buildings in search of warmth, which can be a nuisance. Though harmless, large numbers of these beetles indoors can be annoying. They sometimes release a yellowish fluid that can stain surfaces and has a faint odor. The easiest and least offensive way to rid your home of Asian lady beetles is a good, old-fashioned vacuuming.

Birds are the ladybugs' biggest predator, but they also fall prey to frogs, wasps, dragonflies, spiders, and ants. When threatened by predators, they will excrete a foul-tasting, yellowish fluid from their leg joints, and may also play dead.

You can support ladybug populations by planting native flowers, avoiding broad-spectrum insecticides, and creating insect-friendly habitats. Plants such as dill, fennel, and yarrow not only attract ladybugs but also provide them with nectar and pollen when insect prey is scarce.

Ladybugs are a vital part of the natural world and an ally to anyone who loves plants. Whether crawling across a garden leaf or clustering under the eaves of a home in the fall, these tiny beetles are quietly working to keep ecosystems balanced and crops healthy. With a little care and attention, we can ensure that ladybugs continue to thrive in Oklahoma for generations to come.

Sources:

<https://extension.okstate.edu/fact-sheets/beneficial-insects.html>

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<https://extension.okstate.edu/e-pest-alerts/site-files/documents/2009/ladybug-invasion-coping-with-multi-colored-asian-lady-beetle-march-17-2009.pdf>