



Delightful Ladybug

Did you know that the cute creature we call the "ladybug" is actually a beetle? The friendly red insect with black spots is a ladybird beetle, to be exact.

Nearly 400 species of ladybugs live in North America, and there are about 5,000 species worldwide. Their bright red color is a warning to birds and other predators that they do not taste good. If attacked or threatened, a ladybug will ooze a yellow liquid from its leg joints. The yellow goo is actually the ladybug's blood! It smells bad, and tastes even worse. This is all it takes to convince the ladybug's attacker to stop their snack attack!



A Day in the Life of a Ladybug

The ladybug beetle likes to live in a habitat with plenty of plants, like a garden or meadow. The ladybug's favorite food is the aphid, a type of soft-bodied insect that harms plants and is a pest to farmers. One adult ladybug can munch up to fifty aphids per day, and more than 5,000 in its lifetime.

Female ladybugs lay batches of 20 to 50 tiny yellow eggs on the undersides of leaves in the spring-time. Right after the eggs hatch, the baby ladybugs, known as larvae, look nothing like their parents. In fact, they look more like little black alligators! The larvae are very hungry, and can eat as many as 400 aphids in a few weeks. About one month after they hatch, it's time for the larvae to change again.

When it is ready to become an adult ladybug, a larva will cling to the stem of a plant and stay very still. In this stage of its life, it is called a pupa. It takes a few days for the pupa's rough skin to split open, revealing the smooth and shiny ladybug inside.

Once the air starts to get colder, ladybugs begin to seek shelter for the winter. They cluster together by the thousands under dead leaves, inside hollow logs, and even up in the gutters of our houses. The ladybugs will hibernate (just like bears) until the warm air returns indicating spring has arrived. The average ladybug lifespan is two to three years.

A Farmer's Best Friend

Maybe you have heard this old children's rhyme, "Ladybug, Ladybug, fly away home....your house is on fire, and your children are gone. Except little Nan, who sits in a pan, weaving gold laces as fast as she can!"

What does this strange rhyme mean, and where did it come from?

It was made up by bards in Medieval England, to warn ladybugs crawling on the vines in the fall in search of food. In those days, farmers would set fire to old hop vines to clear the fields for the next planting season. The poem means that the ladybugs' children (larvae) could get away from the flames, but the pupae (Nan) remained fastened to the plants (laces) and couldn't escape.

Farmers have several tales about ladybugs. If the spots on the wings of a ladybug are more than seven, it's a sign of coming famine. If less than seven, it means there will be a good harvest. If numerous ladybugs are seen flying around in the spring, British farmers say it forecasts bountiful crops. Many farmers believe that the arrival of ladybugs will bring fair weather.

Ohio's State Bug

In June 1975, the ladybug was declared Ohio's official state insect. According to the Ohio General Assembly's resolution, the ladybug is "symbolic of the people of Ohio. She is proud and friendly, bringing delight to millions of children when she alights on their hand or arm to display her multi-colored wings, and she is extremely industrious and hardy, able to live under the most adverse conditions and yet retain her beauty and charm, while at the same time being of inestimable value to nature."

Ladybug Lore

- Most cultures believe that a ladybug is lucky. Killing one is said to bring sadness and misfortune.
- If a ladybug is held in the hand while making a wish, the direction that it flies away to shows where your luck will come from.
- In France, if a ladybug landed on you, whatever ailment you had would fly away with the Ladybug.
- In Belgium, people believed that if a ladybug crawled across a young girl's hand, she would be married within a year.
- In Norway, if a man and a woman spot a ladybug at the same time, there will be a romance between them.
- People in Switzerland told their young children that they were brought to them, as babies, by ladybugs.
- In some Asian cultures, it is believed that the ladybug understands human language, and has been blessed by God, Himself.
- In Brussels, the black spots on the back of a ladybug indicate to the person holding it how many children he/she will have.
- According to a Norse legend, the ladybug came to earth riding on a bolt of lightning.
- During the pioneer days, if a family found a ladybug in their log cabin during the winter, it was considered a good omen.

- The Victorian England, people believed that if a ladybug alighted on your hand, you would be receiving new gloves, and if it landed on your head, a new hat would be in your future.
- In the 1800's, some doctors used ladybugs to treat measles! They also believed that if you mashed ladybugs and put them into a cavity, the insects would stop a toothache!
- Folklore suggests if you catch a ladybug in your home, count the number of spots and that's how many dollars you'll soon find.

We are lucky to have ladybugs! This summer, go outside to your local Ohio state park and see if a delightful ladybug will land on you!

Photos from left to right: **Red Ladybird Beetle**, know widely as “ladybug”, on a leaf • **Asian Ladybird Beetle** DO NOT be fooled, this ladybug look-a-like is known to bite, let out a smell, and release yellow staining fluids when threatened. The “w” on the thorax is the clear indicator that it is not its nicer ladybug cousin • **Ladybug Larvae** on a leaf • **Ladybug** laying eggs on a leaf

