

June 8, 2016



Ladybug, ladybug...

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Ladybug, ladybug, fly away home... no, wait a minute. On second thought, all ladybugs please stay right in my garden, if you please! Ladybugs are actually a beetle, not a bug -- and a very good beetle that you should be happy to see in your yard. They are voracious aphid eaters, and one lady bug can consume between 40-75 aphids a day. Aphids are tiny, sucking insects that can be found under leaves of rose bushes and many other garden plants. Left unchecked, aphids suck liquid out of plant leaves, stems, and can damage other tender plant parts. Ladybugs feast not only on aphids, but are also natural enemies of other harmful garden pests such as mites, whiteflies, scales, mealybugs and thrips.

Ladybugs, or lady beetles, are typically about a quarter-inch long with orange wings on their backs and black spots (great colors -- could they be San Francisco Giants fans?). Their color and number of spots can vary with different species; some can be red-winged and some may have no spots at all, while others have up to 13 spots. The most common species in America has a scientifically correct name of Lady Beetle, or the Convergent lady beetle, *Hippodamia convergens*. Worldwide, there are about 5,000 species of lady bugs, with 450 species in North America.

If you see a ladybug in your garden, you're usually lucky enough to see many more. Female ladybugs lay up to 1,000 eggs in just a few minutes. One unique feature of the ladybug is it can enter into reproductive diapause during droughts or when food is not plentiful. Ladybugs protect themselves by secreting a fluid from their legs that tastes bad to predators. They can also freeze or play dead when they're threatened.

Ladybugs have been known to over-winter in large congregations in the Sierra Nevada foothills and mountains, waiting until spring to migrate down to the valley and coastal areas.

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Ladybugs are sold to help gardeners control aphids and other sucking insects, however overall results have not seen significant success. If you choose to buy ladybugs, they must be handled carefully, be refrigerated and need water. They should only be released into your garden at dusk. Large numbers are needed to be effective (for example, one heavily infested rose bush should have about 1,500 beetles released two times, spaced a week apart). Regardless of careful handling, most ladybugs will fly away after being released, about 95 percent leaving within 48 hours.

It's important to recognize lady bug larvae, so you don't inadvertently harm them. Larvae look like alligators and are distinct because of the orange spots that they have on their prothorax. The growth stage is about four to seven weeks from egg to adult. Welcome and protect this beneficial insect in your garden!

Join UCCE Master Gardeners today, June 8th for a children's class, Little Gardens for Kids, which *introduces* youngsters, 5 and older, to miniature gardening in a terrarium. For a \$7.00 registration fee, all materials will be provided. Go to <http://ucanr.edu/kidssmallgardens> for more information. Two classes will be taught between 9:30 and 11:45 at Cameron Park Community Center, 2502 Country Club Drive in Cameron Park.

Learn all about watering techniques and conservation at a free Master Gardener Irrigation class on Saturday, June 11 beginning at 9:00 a.m. in the Sherwood Demonstration Garden, 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville. Also on the same day at the demonstration garden from 8:00 to noon is a free event, Saturdays with Barry, in the Vegetable Garden for demonstrations on gardening through the seasons; see what can be grown in our county and get your questions answered. The Sherwood Demonstration Garden is open throughout the summer on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays, 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

UCCE Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions at local Farmer's Markets, and Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.