

Beneficial bugs to have around your home: The Ladybug

By Jason Johnson



Part 1 in the mini-series of fantastic bugs: Not only are ladybugs lovely to look at, but they are beneficial to have around too!

I am always writing about how much I hate bugs, or pests of any kind for that matter. All bugs have received a bad reputation and I take full responsibility for contributing to that. A few days ago while browsing the net I came across a term that almost seemed ironic to me.

It was an oxymoron if I had ever heard one. The term was beneficial bugs. This term amused me and I knew I had to know more. So I did some research on them and it turns out that some strange people actually encourage certain creatures to live in their gardens and around their house. Rent-free I might add! After researching these “beneficial bugs” I have to say that I’ve come to develop an understanding and an admiration for them. In fact, I realized that I could even learn to love these bugs...

We share similar interests, I suppose. One of these being our hatred of pests. Yes, these beneficial bugs were so-named because they actually assist people in their pest control efforts.

They prey on disgusting, unsuspecting pests like cockroaches. One of these bugs has even been known to prey on my least favourite creature in the animal kingdom, rodents! So I decided to pay homage to these heroes of the bug world. Here it is; my tribute to beneficial bugs.

The Ladybug

Our journey starts with one of the most unlikely heroes of the bunch, the ladybug. Fooling people with their flawless beauty and beautiful patterns, ladybugs are actually a formidable opponent to pests.

Favourite Prey

Ladybugs, also known as lady beetles, have long been seen as an aid to farmers. These bugs feed on many insects, but they are especially fond of crop destroying aphids. While these are their prey of choice, lady beetles will also feed on numerous other sap eaters or plant lice, making them invaluable to farmers.

Super Powers of the Ladybug

What also makes them a farm favourite is the fact that these beetles have a voracious appetite, consuming up to 5 000 aphids in a single life cycle. Not very ladylike I suppose! I believe they burn off all the calories they consume using one of their other super powers; flying. This – in my opinion – is a super power because these bugs can flap their wings about 85 times in a second. That is an amazing 5 100 beats per minute. What a cardio workout that must be!

Ladybugs also release a foul-smelling odour when they are under attack. What is really mental about them, is that this odour actually comes from droplets of blood they release when they are in danger. Their blood is a thick yellow liquid.

Kryptonite

As resilient as they are, these beetles are still bugs and they sometimes can be considered to be pests as well. If you are trying to get rid of them, normal pesticides should do the trick. General pest powders like Borax have been known to be an effective treatment against them as well.

Another natural way to get rid of ladybugs is to burn lemon, menthol or mulberry scented candles in your home. They can’t stand any of these smells. If you don’t have any candles, simply place Vicks vapour rub in your humidifier and this should do the trick.

The most effective pest control method for ladybugs is a product named Diatomaceous Earth. It’s a powdered substance made from fossilized marine phytoplankton. This product breaks down the bug’s exoskeleton and causes massive internal damage that eventually leads to the death of the bug. This product is not harmful to larger animals and is in fact edible to humans. Also, seeing that I have really come to like lady beetles, I would rather go with the Vicks route; this seems a bit too extreme, not to mention gruesome for the poor spotted critters.

The enemies of the ladybug

Lady beetles don’t have many natural enemies. Their brightly coloured wings are generally a warning for birds not to consume them. There are however certain birds that have an exotic pallet and do feed on ladybugs. Birds are immune to any chemicals they secrete and do view them as prey. Certain spiders and other beetles will also feed on ladybugs.

Parasitoid wasps lay their eggs on lady beetles or on their larvae. When their wasp eggs hatch, the baby wasps feed on their hosts, eventually killing them. A bit creepy, but effective I suppose.

So, there you have it; the first in a range of heroic and brave bugs that will make your life a whole lot easier. Ladybugs are as effective as they are beautiful. If you fancy yourself quite the gardener, this is definitely one bug that you should welcome into your garden with open arms.

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