

LADYBUGS

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Life Cycle: The length of the life cycle depends upon temperature, humidity and food supply usually requiring about three to four weeks. In the spring, over wintering females find food, then lay egg clusters of 10 to 50 eggs in aphid colonies. They lay from 50 to 300 eggs in a lifetime. Eggs hatch in 3-5 days with the larvae feeding on aphids or other insects for 2-3 weeks then, they pupate. Adults emerge in 7-10 days. There may be 5-6 generations per year. In the autumn, adults hibernate in aggregation sites. These sites can be along a fence row, under a fallen tree or, under a rock.

Amount of Food Consumed: Although adults and larvae are primarily known as predators of aphids, they also like soft-scale insects, mealy bugs and spider mites. Some feed on plant and pollen mildews. One larva will eat about 400 aphids during its development. An adult will eat about 300 aphids before it lays eggs or, about 3-10 aphids for each egg laid. An adult will consume more than 5,000 aphids in its lifetime.

Collecting Ladybugs for Sale: Ladybugs are collected in the mountains of California. Ladybugs return to the same huge aggregation sites each year. Some sites have been known to contain as many as 500 gallons of the bugs (72,000-80,000 adults per gallon). Bugs collected in December, January, February, and early March before normal migration, are cold-stored. When released they tend to disperse quickly and widely especially when temperatures reach 65F and above. As a consequence, few stay in the area where they are liberated. Those released in the summer, don't disperse any great distance. They will drink water, but don't eat existing on their stored fat.

Purchased Ladybugs = Unwise Investment: Shipped-in Ladybugs aren't really an economical way to manage aphid infestations. Bugs collected from outside Arizona are of less value as a pest eater than the local beetle populations, which will multiply in accordance with prey. Ladybugs can be beneficial in a greenhouse with tightly screened vents. In that case, one-half pint (about 4,500 ladybugs) per 3,000 square feet is the recommended rate. Release in the evening after watering down the area. Spray on wheast (a combination of whey and yeast) on plants to attract Ladybugs.