

Garden Talk

Ladybug Habitat

"Where People who Love to Garden, Love to Shop"™



There are many reasons to love ladybugs. This little red beetle started as a legend during the middle ages. European farmers, about 1000AD, struggled with insects that would eat and destroy their crops. At the first sign of crop damage farmers would pray to "Our Lady the Virgin Mary" for help. The little bugs would come and eat the harmful insects, so farmers, assuming that ladybugs were in answer to their prayers, named the bugs "Our Lady's Beetles", which eventually morphed into "ladybugs". Since the 1800's farmers have been raising ladybugs domestically to control pests on their organic farms.

Today, you can buy ladybugs to release in your own garden to control unwanted insects. Ladybugs are gaining popularity as natural insect control by people who prefer not to use chemicals in their gardens.

Ladybugs are most active during the warm days of spring through autumn. They primarily scarf up aphids but also devour scale, mealybugs, spider mites, and thrips. They are unrelenting little eaters, each consuming as many as 5,000 aphids in its lifetime.

There are over 500 species of ladybugs in the United States alone, and over 4500 in the world. The ladybug we recommend here at Watters Garden Center is the species *Hippodamia convergens*. You can recognize this particular ladybug by the two white dashes on the back of its body. Watters carries these ladybugs starting in March continuing through the spring season.



How to Release Ladybugs in the Garden

Keep them Cool - When you get home with your ladybugs, leave their container sealed and place it in the refrigerator or a cool space (35-40 degrees). Ladybugs have wings and like to use them, so you will need to slow them down long enough for them to find your gardens attractive. Being cool calms them. Keep them refrigerated until you're ready to release them in the evening.

Ladybugs will be thirsty - On the evening of their dispersal, spray or mist the parts of the garden where you plan to release your ladybugs. This will allow them to re-hydrate before searching for a meal. You will not have to do this again as ladybugs get most of their moisture from the insects they consume.

Release them at dusk - Introduce ladybugs to your garden at the base of a plant just as dusk overtakes the area you've chosen for their release. If you have a plant with a particular aphid problem open the cup at the base of that plant. This will give them the night to settle in, find food, and realize that your garden is a great place to live!

Get your kids involved! Kids especially have fun releasing ladybugs and this is a great way to teach them about environmental responsibility. Ladybugs stick around safe sources of food, so kids will find them all season long. Stop by the garden center for a cup of ladybugs, take them to your garden, then have fun enjoying nature at work.

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