

Friendly insect's fact sheet 3



Ladybirds

Probably the most familiar of our beetles, ladybirds are one of the few British insects widely regarded with respect and even affection. This friendship is an old one. Ladybirds have long been connected with good fortune in myths and legends, and from an early age children still learn to treasure them through story books and rhymes. Such high regard is well-earned. Most ladybirds and their young (larvae) are carnivorous, feeding on and helping to control large numbers of insect pests, particularly greenfly. They can also eat mites, scale insects, mealy bugs and small caterpillars.



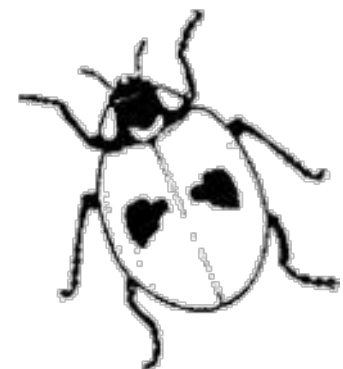
Little monsters

Ladybird larvae look quite unlike ladybird beetles. Small and spidery at first they soon grow and develop powerful jaws and a characteristic colouration - dark grey/blue grey body with white, black or orange markings.

With their spiky segmented body, ferocious appearance and a voracious appetite for greenfly, it is not surprising to hear them nicknamed 'insect alligators'. To the unfamiliar eye it would be easy to react against these 'ugly' creatures and assume they must be pests. Take care not to harm such a valuable ally in your garden.

Life cycle

Starting as a tiny (1-2mm long), shiny, yellow egg, laid in a cluster on a leaf, the ladybird passes through several stages



before reaching the adult beetle we are so familiar with. Each egg hatches to release a small (2mm), black, 6-legged larva which eats greedily and increases in size by shedding its skin three times in its lifetime. The full grown larva eventually attaches itself to the leaf and forms a pupa, from which the adult beetle emerges 1-2 weeks later.

Ladybirds emerge from hibernation in late March/April, to feed and mate. Eggs are laid from late spring into summer. Beetles and larvae feed through the summer; the larvae pupate and produce a new generation of beetles during mid to late summer. These beetles feed and look for hibernation sites. Few of the older (1 year) beetles survive to hibernate a second winter - one year is the common lifespan of a ladybird.

Ladybirds will use the same kind of artificial shelters used by lacewings to over winter a simple yet effective design can be found on fact sheet 2.

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