# Article Side

Benefits of the Ladybug by Steve Lum

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It would be safe to say that every American is familiar with the ladybug â€“ its small compact shell which is reminiscent of a Volkswagen Beetle, its cheerful spots that make it one of the few bugs whose image is used in classroom dÃ©cor.  It also shares a name with a popular childrenâ€™s magazine and is a popular Halloween costume.

An image search on â€œladybug decorationsâ€• conjures up myriad red and black spotted wings on wall hangings, on invitations, on placemats. A search for â€œmosquito decorationsâ€•? Not so much.

Ladybugs are beloved for more than just their appearance â€“ their appetite is perhaps one of their most valuable assets. Ladybugs are hungry. Unlike many other bugs found near your home, they arenâ€™t hungry for the wood that makes up your house or for the roses gracing your back fence.

Ladybugs (also called ladybirds, lady beetles, or ladybird beetles) have long held a place in folklore as a sign of good luck. It isnâ€™t just an old wivesâ€™ tale â€“ ladybugs prefer to feast on aphids, a plant-eating pest, and other bugs that target plants. Ladybugs act as your own personal targeted pest control â€“ according to National Geographic, they lay eggs in the midst of colonies of aphids and other herbivorous insects. As larvae, young ladybugs begin devouring, and each can eat about 5,000 aphids in its lifetime.

Ladybugs are found throughout the world, barring the extreme northern and southern regions like the North and South Poles. National Geographic notes that their distinctive red-and-black spotted coloring is made to make them look like bad news for predators. They can secrete an unpleasant-tasting liquid from their leg joints â€“ this acts as a predator deterrent, as the coloring serves as a reminder that a red spotted bug means a terrible taste.

Ladybugs donâ€™t only stop aphids and similar bugs from damaging plants â€“ they help discourage ants as well. Ants are attracted to a secretion produced by aphids, and some species of ants develop aphid â€œfarmsâ€• where they keep and cultivate aphids for this secretion. With fewer aphids around, ants are more likely to leave your home and garden alone.

In 1880s California, the ladybug saved the citrus industry â€“ scale insects from Australia were killing entire groves of orange and lemon trees. Growers released $1,500 worth of Australian ladybugs over two years and successfully brought the scale insects under control (Celticbug.com). Today, ladybugs (as well as ladybug houses) are available for purchase by those who wish to use them as a natural means of pest control.

The ladybug has a well-deserved international reputation as a protector of agriculture, and many languages associate the insect with God. The name â€œladybirdâ€• supposedly arose from the moniker â€œOur Ladyâ€™s Bird,â€• a reference to the Virgin Mary. Other less common historical names for it inclu the German marienhuhn (or â€œMaryâ€™s chickenâ€•), a Swedish name translating to â€œthe Virgin Ma hen,â€• and the Spanish vaquilla de Dios, or â€œGodâ€™s little cow (campus.udayton.edu).â€•

The ladybug is by no means underappreciated, and its role in agriculture over the world shouldnâ€™t be discounted. The ladybug is both an attractive ornament and an environmentally-sound, green pest control â€“ perfect for todayâ€™s eco-conscious farmers, gardeners, and homeowners.

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