

Dr. Bug's Bugbytes

Infestation of the lady beetle

by Bob Cameron

That's no lady . . . Everyone used to love them but their popularity has waned over this past year.

I discussed lady beetles in a past article, but since they became the "bug of the year" last year I thought I would write about them again.

While we have been seeing the Multicoloured Asian Lady Beetle for the past four or five years, the fall of 2002 was by far the heaviest outbreak of these insects.

The major infestation that occurred late last summer was probably related to the outbreak of another imported insect, the Asian Soybean Aphid. This insect is a major pest of soybean crops and was first reported in Wisconsin in 2000.

Last summer they occurred in tremendous numbers even showing up in areas like downtown Toronto as we know from all the media reports.

These aphids caused large scale damage to soybeans in Ontario, some crops suffering 25 per cent and more reductions in yield with some fields being plowed under without even being harvested.

Since aphids are one of the prime food sources of lady beetles, their tremendous numbers probably contributed to the explosion of the lady beetle population.

Attempts to introduce this lady beetle were first made as far back as 1916 and have occurred numerous times since then.

They have been introduced to control pests of various crops such as aphids on pecan trees in the southern U.S. Many other species of lady beetles have been introduced by both the U.S. and Canadian Departments of Agriculture over the years but this species is the one that has caught our attention.

To dispel some myths, these beetles:

- Did not all come from Loblaws.
- Were not brought in to control purple loose-strife.
- Are not different species depending on colour and number of spots.
- Do bite (without provocation).
- Give off an odour and stain if crushed.
- Do overwinter.
- Do not feed or breed in the home.

These beetles are called multi-coloured because they come in a variety of colours from pale yellow to red or orange. The number of spots also varies from none to as many as 19.

While both the larvae and adults feed primarily on small insects and mites etc., they were observed last summer feeding on fruits such as raspberries and apples. This was probably because there were not enough regular food sources to sustain the large beetle population.

Where people used to carefully scoop up lady beetles that had entered the house and put them outside, now they just want rid of them.

Vacuuming in the house is the best way to control them indoors. Seasonal treatments for other pests such as cluster flies and paper wasps will also help to control the lady beetles. Timing is critical as in the fall they do not start coming in until mid October. Last fall they started on Thanksgiving weekend.

Lady beetles that entered last fall will now be coming out of dormancy and will be attempting to get back outside.

When they emerge inside the house, they are attracted to the windows by the light and will congregate there, trying to get out.

Factors such as aphid populations and weather will determine if they will be a major nuisance again this summer.



Givin' you the dirt on PRACTICAL PLANTS

by Sean James

Winter has freed our soil and planting season is upon us. It's time to get out to the garden centres and buy some new plants.

What if the garden is full? As a home gardener and a chronic pack-rat I can always find room for another plant. It may involve what a friend calls "releasing" another plant to a neighbour's garden to create some space.

If you're going to spend the money and the time, make sure you're investing wisely. What makes a practical perennial? For starters, a perennial is a plant that grows back year after year as opposed to an annual that you need to plant fresh every spring.

The more interest a plant offers throughout the season the better. The less maintenance it requires the better. Perhaps those are obvious points but consider details such as how often a plant needs to be divided and if the plant is prone to disease or insects. Lupins, for example, while beautiful, suffer from aphids on a regular basis. That is not to say, "don't use Lupins" but rather, know what you're getting into.

Some great perennials take patience such as Russian Sage (Perovskia) that loves baking sun and the shade loving Barrenwort (Epimedium sp.). Others offer blooms late in the season such as Wolfsbane (Aconitum carmichaelii), flowering as late as November. It also has glossy deep green foliage.

Most perennials evolve throughout the season. One of the best groups for this are the Stonecrops (Sedum sp.). The spring foliage is rubbery and often has lovely colour with purple, blue, and variegated leaves to be found. Later

in summer the buds grow, changing the texture of the area followed by the long lasting flowers. That's enough for any plant. Right? Stonecrops even offer winter interest through the seedheads which are rust coloured and hold the snow well in the winter.

Bergenia has large pink flowers in spring but that's not the best reason to plant it. The mahogany foliage of cultivars such as "Bressingham Ruby" lasts right through the winter making it a favorite in many gardens.

Siberian Iris is great for mid-season bloom and has nice foliage. Phlox carolina "Miss Lingard" blooms from July to October if the dead flower clusters are cut off. She handles sun or shade well.

And a couple of practical shrubs for good measure...

Variegated Weigelia (variegated means the plant has multi-coloured leaves such as green with

white edges) has nice form in winter, great foliage all growing season and nice pink flowers in mid-summer. It is also slow growing so it won't try and take over the world like some other shrubs.

The Golden Canadian Juniper, Juniperus communis "Depressa Aurea", is another shrub that evolves throughout the year, although it is a bit hard to find. If you ask at your favorite garden centre they will often be able to find it and bring it in for you. In the spring the foliage is blinding, cheerily yellow. It deepens to a rich gold in the summer and becomes a burnished, almost rusty bronze in the winter.

Having read all this, remember it's not what's in print that counts. When all is said and done, it's your garden and what you like is the most important. That . . . and the envy of the neighbours.

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