

The familiar ladybug, ladybird, or lady beetle is a favorite to see in the garden. They are a small beetle found all over the world in areas with a climate to support crops. There are about five hundred different kinds of ladybugs. Black spots on a red or yellow back make them easy to identify. Ladybugs may be a lot of other colors too, pink, white, orange, and even black. Some ladybugs may have stripes or even a solid-colored back. What you are seeing on the back of the ladybug are the wing covers. That bright coloration on the wing covers serves as a warning to some predators, like birds. That coloring tells birds that the ladybug does not taste very good. Many insects with red colors are signaling danger to other animals. That red coloration is protection for the ladybug and other animals. Predators know to avoid them because they are poisonous or taste bad. We use red lights and signs to signal danger, too.

Ladybugs can be helpful in the garden by feeding on aphids and other small insect pests. If the population gets out of balance, however, there can be too many ladybugs. Then the ladybug becomes the pest because it eats good bugs or bites people.

Did you know that ladybugs can produce a toxic chemical? That chemical is why ladybugs taste bad to birds and other predators. If a ladybug is disturbed, it may leave behind a yellow mark. That is a foul-smelling bloody discharge to discourage predators. Many insects are capable of synthesizing toxins from plants for self-protection.

When you think about it, there is an amazing amount of life going on in your yard or planter box. You have life and death, chemical warfare, and the food chain all happening right at your back door.

Can you see the spotted bug?

