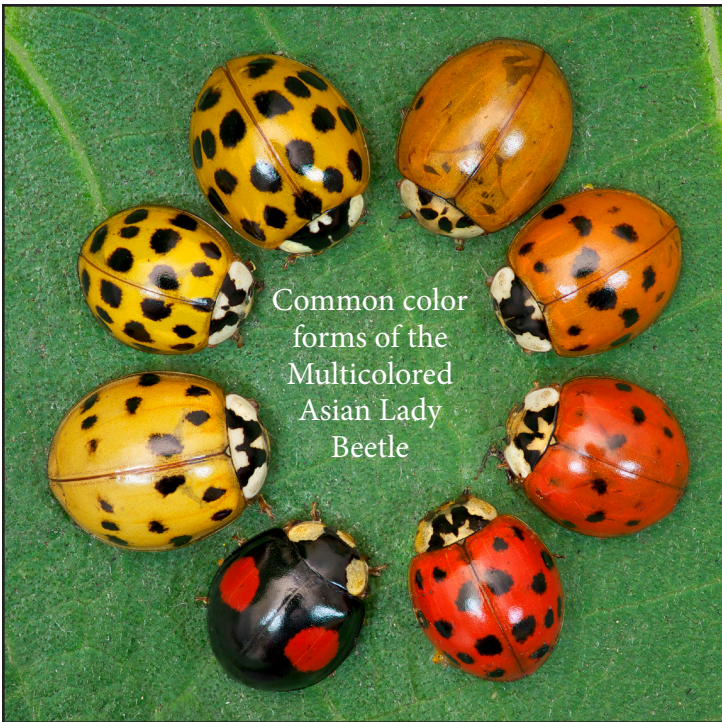


# Lady Beetles

## Status

- Beneficial predators
- No health threat



Common color forms of the Multicolored Asian Lady Beetle

Lady Beetles are some of the most well-known insects. Other common names include ladybird beetles and ladybugs. In some cultures, their presence is considered good luck and a sign of a bountiful harvest. Adults are typically about 5 mm (nearly 0.25 inch) long, but species range from 1-10 mm (0.04-0.4 inches). They are usually convex (dome-shaped with the back arched upward), round or oval in outline, and have clubbed antennae. The most conspicuous species are red or red-orange, black-spotted or spotless. Other colors include black, light grey, brown, and yellow. There are nearly 6,000 known species, about 475 in North America, over 125 in California, almost 30 in Orange County.

Adults use their biting mandibles to feed on soft-bodied insects, mostly aphids and scales. They generally do not bite when handled, but will occasionally give you a light nip. When disturbed, they fold up their legs and play dead. They also release a bitter-tasting yellow-orange fluid from their leg joints, thought to be mildly toxic to animals that try to eat lady beetles.



Multicolored Asian Lady Beetle: larva (right), pupa (left)



## Life Cycle

Lady beetles have four stages in their life cycle: egg, larva, pupa, and adult. Adult females lay small clusters of long yellow eggs on leaves. About one week later, larvae hatch from the eggs and use their biting mandibles to feed on small insects such as aphids. As larvae eat and mature, they outgrow their skin, grow a new skin layer beneath it, and shed the old one, a process called molting. Following each molt, the larvae are a little larger. After three growth-molt cycles, the larva forms a special skin (pupal skin) beneath and sheds the old one, revealing the pupal skin (pupal stage). After weeks or months of development, the adult beetle emerges from the pupal case. The adult is pale at first but turns its final color as its body dries. The process of changing body forms while maturing is called metamorphosis.

## Common Species

Multicolored Asian Lady Beetle (*Harmonia axyridis*). Introduced to North America from Asia around 1980, now abundant. Adults are highly variable, most often red-orange with bold black spots, but sometimes with few small or no spots, or even all black with two orange spots.

Convergent Lady Beetle (*Hippodamia convergens*). The most common species in North America. Adults spend winters congregated in huge numbers in canyons, foothills, and tall mountains, even under snow pack.

## Convergent Lady Beetles

Their front wings are red-orange and spotted with black or are spotless. Two white lines on the pronotum almost meet and make the letter "V".

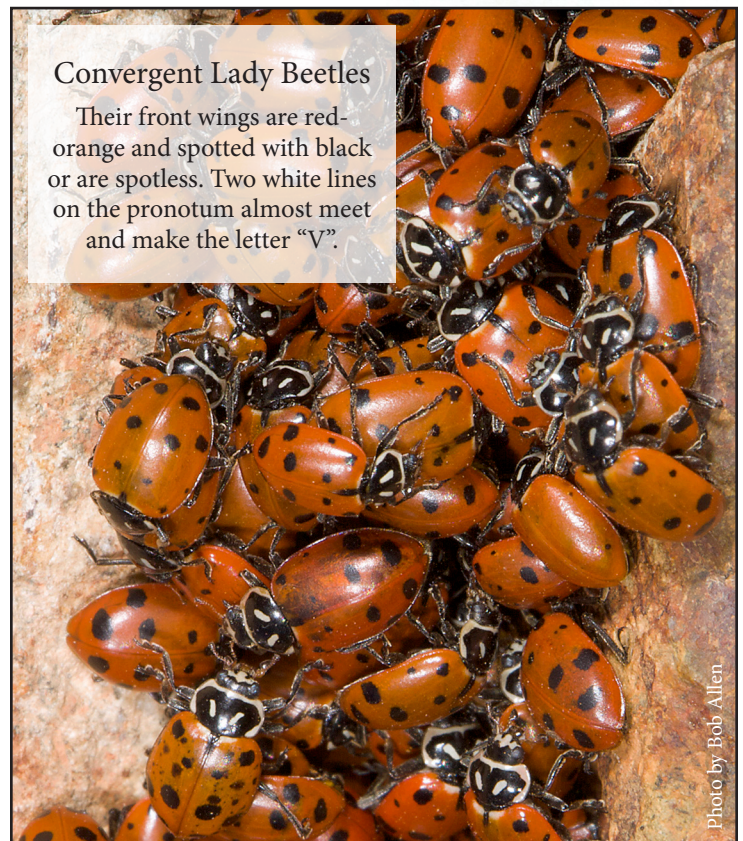


Photo by Bob Allen

