

## **Lady Bug, Lady Bug, Fly Away Home**

### AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

I remember a nursery rhyme from grade school that went, "Lady bug, lady bug, fly away home. Your house is on fire and your children are gone. All except one, and her name is Ann, and she hid under the frying pan." My sister's name is Ann and I used to drive her crazy repeating that over and over, as only a little brother can. Well, I'm sure there's more than just a few people around who wish that the lady bugs would fly away to someone else's home!

Last fall many homes were inundated with multicolored Asian lady beetles. These rascals built up in very large numbers, late last summer, feeding on the abundance of aphids that were found infesting numerous crops in the region. Then, as this species is prone to do, they flew to buildings and tried to find their way into those buildings nestling themselves quietly out of sight to spend the winter.

As people were calling me last fall asking what to do about them I suggested that they treat around the exterior of their homes and then use a vacuum cleaner inside the home to clean the little rascals up. But I assured them that before long, colder weather would put them to sleep. That is until spring time. Well, springtime has arrived a little bit early and now, on warm and sunny days, they are breaking hibernation, flying around the inside of homes, basically trying to figure out how to get back outside.

Unfortunately, there's not a lot that can be done right now other than to vacuum them up or open the windows and let them out. The lady beetles enter our homes through any little crack or crevice they can find. They may enter under or around doors or windows. They may work their way into a basement or an attic only to wake up and wander into our living quarters. They can hide in draperies, or behind electrical outlet cover plates. They can even, literally, come out of the woodwork. Once they start to come out of hibernation there isn't much you can do other than the vacuum. They will head to windows so at least you can usually know where to find them.

The multicolored Asian lady beetle is the only lady beetle species that invades homes. All other species of lady beetles that we have in Kansas overwinter under vegetation. While this particular lady beetle is not native, it unfortunately is not going to go away. Some years we will have more than other years, but dealing with them is just going to become a way of life.

As I said earlier, pesticides in the spring aren't going to do you any good and I discourage their use in the house. As the lady beetles come out of hibernation they will fly towards any bright light trying to get outside. Periodic sweeps with the vacuum are about all you can do. It's hard to say how long the plague will last this spring, but I'd expect on and off (weather dependent) for four to six weeks.

You will never eliminate the problem but your best approach is to spend time this spring and summer sealing up any little cracks in the house. Caulk around window frames. Replace weather stripping around doors. Many lady beetles will enter the attic or basement only to show up in your living quarters the following spring. Once inside homes they will hide behind window and door trim work, baseboards, the hiding places are endless. Once they start swarming to the sides of your house in the early autumn you will want to spray the foundation and lower part of your house with a lawn and garden pesticide.

This beneficial pest isn't going to go away. We are likely stuck with them forever. Taking steps before next fall will help reduce how many enter your home and also help weatherproof your house!