Multicoloured Asian Lady Beetle
Harmonia axyridis

Everybody likes ladybugs, except when there are a few thousand of them on the side of their house trying to get inside. Some homeowners in the Fraser Valley will experience this phenomenon for a few days in mid to late October.

The species that congregates is *Harmonia axyridis*, the Multicolored Asian Lady Beetle, which was intentionally introduced from Japan to the United States in the 1980s and has continually expanded its range. *Harmonia axyridis* was first noticed in British Columbia in the early 1990s. It was brought to North America as a biocontrol agent to control aphids on crops in spring and summer.

Harmonia axyridis is variable in appearance. Most commonly this medium sized beetle is orange with up to 19 black spots, but some forms have no spots. A distinguishing characteristic is the 'M' formed by 5 black spots on the pronotum (area just behind the antennae). See images 1-8 for life stages.

In their native habitat, these ladybugs migrate in the fall to sunny mountainside caves to spend the winter. However, with a lack of natural overwintering sites, they seek shelter in attics, garages, sheds and other dry, dark areas. They usually select the south or southwest side of buildings on sunny days to gather. The first arriving beetles emit an aggregation pheromone, a chemical which attracts other beetles. Many of the beetles will leave on their own by nightfall and move into leaf litter, underneath logs, and similar protected natural sites. However, some will find their way into houses through cracks and vents or other openings. As the temperature rises in late winter and spring the ladybugs become active and try to find their way outside. Once again, they may appear on walls and ceilings, and especially around windows as they are drawn to the light.

If ladybugs should choose your house as a gathering area in the autumn, don't panic. They are a nuisance but do no real harm. They do not damage the house or contents, and although they occasionally will bite people, it is a mild and barely noticeable nip. Some people notice an objectionable odor associated with the congregations; this is from fluid emitted by the beetles. They do not reproduce or feed during the overwintering period.

The best approach to dealing with this problem is to prevent the ladybugs from getting into homes. Make sure cracks around windows and doors are weather-stripped and vent openings in attics are covered with window screening. Because ladybugs are beneficial insects, spraying the congregated ladybugs is not ideal. A low pressure water spray from a garden hose will encourage them to disperse from sides of buildings. Applying insecticides in attics for control of ladybugs is not recommended as the dead beetle carcasses will attract scavenger insects that may subsequently move into the other areas of the house. If removal is considered necessary, the beetles can be swept or vacuumed up, and then released outside or kept in a paper bag in a cool dark place (such as a garage) until spring.

For more information:

University of New Hampshire: https://extension.unh.edu/resource/multicolored-asian-ladybug-fact-sheet

Washington State University: https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/408/2015/02/PLS-114-Asian-Lady-Beetle.pdf

Pacific Northwest Pest Management Handbooks: https://pnwhandbooks.org/insect/structural-health/nuisance-household/nuisance-household-lady-beetle

Images 1, 2, and 3 are adult *Harmonia axyridis*, Multicoloured Asian Lady Beetle. These beetles overwinter in sheltered areas including buildings and homes. Beetles are about 6 mm long.

1.

2.

3.

Eggs (image 4) laid in summer on leaves near aphid colonies. Eggs are about 1 mm long:

Larvae hatch from eggs, eat aphids, and grow. They can be found on leaves. Images 5 and 6 are full sized larvae, up to 8 mm long.

4.

5.

6.

Once larvae complete their growth, they pupate on plant leaves for about 2 weeks (image 7). Then an adult emerges. It takes a few hours for their spots to appear (image 8).

7.

8.