

Nature Watch 5

Here is a strange looking creature that you might see in your garden at the moment.



You will find them on the ground or on leaves as they are not able to fly...YET! You may think you don't know what they are but, in fact, when they grow to be adults they are one of the most well-known garden insects.

It is...



A LADYBIRD LARVA!

Ladybirds can be found in most parts of the world (all except the very coldest) and there are many different species. In fact, in the UK alone there are believed to be about **47** different types! Not all ladybirds are red with black spots. Ladybirds can be yellow, orange, brown or red with black, white or red spots. Some even have stripes instead of spots! The most common UK ladybird is the 7 Spot Ladybird - which is red with, yes, you guessed it, 7 black spots.

They are very helpful in the garden as, as well as looking absolutely beautiful, they LOVE munching on all the little aphids that can infest the plants that we are trying to grow and enjoy. In fact, in one year a single ladybird can eat around 5000 aphids!

Predators such as birds like to eat insects but the ladybirds' bright colours act as an important defence mechanism, warning animals they'd better not eat them. When threatened, the bugs secrete an oily, yucky, yellow fluid from joints in their legs – and their distinctive colouring acts a reminder to any peckish predators that they taste disgusting!

Encouraging ladybirds into our gardens.

1. As well as aphids, ladybirds also like the pollen of certain flowers. If you have any of these in your gardens you might well find ladybirds nearby.

Nasturtiums



Lavender



Chamomile



Scented Geraniums



But they are not the only plants they like. See how many different plants you find ladybirds on.

2. You might like to make a ladybird house so that they have somewhere to hibernate as the weather gets cooler later in the year. Here is a link for a house which uses recycled objects which most people will have in their homes already.

<https://schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk/resources/activity/make-a-simple-bug-or-ladybird-home>

Once you have made it, it will be interesting to watch the ladybirds use it (and also to notice how many other minibeasts enjoy it).

A treat for me!

This is also the time of year when birds are getting ready to leave their nests. While I was walking in the woods this week I heard a very loud chirping coming from one of the Silver Birch trees nearby. I looked very carefully and was able to see a baby woodpecker looking out of the hole in the tree trunk where it had hatched. The next day I went again and it had already flown away, so I was very lucky indeed to see it! The next time you are taking a walk listen carefully to the birds and see how many different ones you can spot – they are quite hard to see at times!



Take care, and keep enjoying nature!