

## LADYBUGS AS YOUNGSTERS

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One of the delights of gardening comes when observing the fauna as well as the flora. Insects in particular allow us glimpses of the fascinating non-human world. This fall, even with rainy weather upon us early, you may notice ladybug larvae, sitting quietly where they have settled down to pupate on leaves.

In tune with the season, larvae look Halloweenish, black and orange, flattened like little alligators with three sets of legs. They are wider at the head end and taper to narrow below the abdomen. The good news is these larvae are even hungrier than their parents, consuming several hundred aphids before reaching the pupation stage. Check the internet for 'Images' and 'ladybug larvae' to view photos.

Adult ladybugs, more accurately known as lady beetles, are among the most recognizable of all insects. They vary in color from solid red through orange, with varying numbers of black spots. One common type in western Washington gardens is the convergent lady beetle (*Hippodamia convergens*.) Being rather adorable has definitely helped with their recognition factor! They go through complete metamorphosis, from egg through larvae, to pupation, to the adult. The eggs resemble narrow yellow ovals, standing on their ends in clumps, often in clumps of 12-14. Female lady beetles produce eggs several times throughout the summer, until cooler weather. Eggs hatch in about a week, and the larvae begin to grow.

They attach themselves to leaves by their abdomens, and hunch up to pupate. The pupal cases are the same size and shape as adult lady beetles, and rather transparent. The adult will emerge in 3 to 12 days depending on weather conditions. Then the adults mate and either begin hunting food or settle down to hibernate (they live over winter in the adult stage). In western Washington, they remain active until the weather is significantly colder.

People often ask how to release lady bird beetles in their gardens. Don't release - learn to identify them and allow them to go through their life cycles in your garden. These are helpful creatures that will stay with you and help you with gardening pests next season.