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Writer: Tony Melton, County Agent
Florence County

The Invasion of the Ladybugs

Many folks used to think Ladybugs were cute. However, every fall my phones ring off the hook with complaints of lady beetles invading homes. Even beneficial insects, like lady beetles, are not welcome inside our homes. This phenomenon has become a perennial fall event throughout the United States. The culprit is the Asian lady beetle in search of protected places to overwinter. In our area, movement into buildings typically begins in late October and can continue on warm days throughout most of the winter.

Lady beetle flights are heaviest on warm sunny days when temperatures climb above 60 degrees F. They tend to congregate initially on the sunnier, southwest sides of buildings in mid-afternoon. Light colored homes receiving direct afternoon sun are most likely to attract the beetles.

Once the beetles have alighted, they attempt to enter cracks and other dark openings in search of hibernation sites. These locations may be anywhere on the structure but especially beneath exterior siding, around window and door frames, soffits, fascia boards, and through weep holes and attic or crawl space vents. Sealing exterior cracks and openings with caulk, screening, weatherstripping, etc., is the most effective long-term, prevention against beetle entry.

However, pest-proofing is time consuming and impractical for many folks. Therefore, an exterior insecticide treatment is another way to temporarily manage a lady beetle home invasion. An external application of a pyrethroid insecticide has been shown not only to kill the invaders but also repels the lady beetles. Locally, many different brand name pyrethroid insecticides including Tempo, Viper, permethrin, Demon, etc. are available. They may be applied by professional pest control firms or some are available for homeowners to use themselves. Remember to always read and follow all pesticide label directions because the label is the law.

Once the beetles are indoors, the best way to remove them is with a vacuum cleaner. When brushed or handled the beetles often secrete a yellowish-orange fluid. Insecticides applied indoors tend to be ineffective and may stain or leave unwanted residues on walls, counter tops, and other surfaces.

To learn the specifics on gardening we have both free and for-sale publications at our office in the back of the Public Services Building on the corner of Third Loop and Irby St. You may also visit our Home & Garden Information Center through our web site at www.clemson.edu/florence. I may be contacted through our web site, amelton@clemson.edu, or 661- 4800.

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