

You can't buy friends

Ladybugs are a gardener's best friend. They serve the role as the "Garden Sheriff", killing all the bad bugs that threaten our plants. They do a great job of keeping law and order in the garden. A ladybug (more properly called a ladybeetle) can eat as many as 5,000 aphids in its lifetime!

Although they are a great friend in the garden, don't spend your money on ladybeetles.

The most commonly sold ladybeetle is the convergent ladybeetle. These beetles eat heartily during the autumn in the lowland valleys of the Western USA, develop a fat layer in their bodies, and then fly up nearby mountains to hibernate. These beetles sleep together in huge clusters of up to 40 million. While sleeping, these ladybeetles are gathered, refrigerated and then packaged for sale to gardeners.

The problem with buying ladybeetles is the insects still think they are in the mountains. They have an inborn desire after hibernating to fly several miles down to the lowland valley before they begin feeding again.



Studies have shown that purchased ladybeetles generally fly 20–30 miles after being released, burning up their fat layer before starting to eat new insects. Within 24 hours, less than 1% of the ladybeetles you release in your garden will remain—probably the bug with a broken wing. Within 48 hours, you will have difficulty finding any ladybeetles. For goodness sake, gardens in the next county may benefit more than your garden from these ladybeetles!

In general, buying predator insects is a weak approach to fighting outdoor pests. Keep in mind you must already have pests for these predators to eat or they will go hunting somewhere else. Green lacewings are considered the best choice, but they still are a bit tricky to handle. The timely and judicious use of insecticides,

including insecticidal soaps, neem, and natural pyrethroids is a far better strategy. Most importantly, keep your plants growing strong so they can withstand minor insect pest infestations. DG

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