



# Earthly Elements

"Helpful Information From The Trenches"

Issue 1

Spring Edition

March 2002

## Welcome to our Newsletter!

I hope that you'll find the information useful, inspirational & sometimes entertaining. It will be available quarterly; March, June, September & December.

All issues will have themes with articles & information to inspire you based on the seasons they're offered. This month you'll find information about peonies, a popular spring perennial, as well as a reprint of a report concerning the fall invasion of ladybugs. Although this may seem out of season, I've taken the liberty to print it because I received many questions about this dilemma last fall & didn't have adequate answers for some of you. I believe that the article will clear up any confusion or conflicting reports that you may have heard. There's also the "Gardener Gatherings" section, that will list local gardening events such as garden walks, perennial ex-changes & classes that I'll be teaching.



## The Pleasure of Peonies

When spring is in the air, I expectantly await the blossoms of the Peony. Who can resist the aroma & beauty of these heirloom treasures? If there was a garden flower that I would describe as a "must have" perennial, it would be the peony. Popular since ancient Greece, the peony root was once believed to cure nightmares & nervous disorders as well as having other medicinal uses. It was even eaten as a side dish! The Chinese regarded it as a status symbol and Thomas Jefferson wrote of its popularity in the garden.

Called the poor man's rose, these hearty & long lived perennials are classified in two ways, by bloom time or the shape of the flowers. Depending on the variety, the peonies first blooms can be seen in early-May, while other varieties open in mid-May & late-May.

Where flower shape is concerned there are 4 categories. Single peonies have a ring of

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five or more petals with a central ring of stamens. Japanese peonies have a ring of petals around a central cluster of modified stamens that are narrow, flat & bear no pollen. The fragrant 'Bowl of Beauty' is an exquisite example of this category. Semi-double peonies have several rings of petals around visible stamens. The last category, which are my favorite are the double peonies. 'Sara Bernhardt' another well known & fragrant variety is in this group. Their petal structure consists of many concentric rings of petals & no visible stamens. Although they tend to be quite top heavy & need to be caged or staked, they are well worth the effort.

When including peonies in your garden the selection of longer blooming perennials is very important. Some plants that are good companions for peonies are: shrub roses, foxglove, iris (German & Siberian), daylilies, lamb's ear & black eye susan. The main reason is because once the peony blooms are gone, you will need other colorful plants to fill in around the shrub-like mound of green foliage. Choosing plants that offer contrasting color, texture & size in their foliage is equally important.

Besides their beauty & fragrance the allure of peonies is that once established they can live practically forever. Although they don't like to be disturbed, they can be up rooted, divided & spread around to enhance other areas of the garden. The best time to do this is in the fall. Consider the task as a wonderful gift to yourself. Then eagerly await the abounding beauty that will unwrap itself in spring, year after year.

## GROUNDS FOR YOUR GROUND



Next time you stop in for a cup of coffee, get something for your garden too.

Starbucks stores nationwide are offering complimentary spent coffee grounds to add to your compost pile. Coffee grounds boost the nitrogen & sulfur content of your compost. Stop in at your local Starbucks (just before closing time is usually best) & ask for the spent grounds. You'll get a reused coffee bag full of spent grounds labeled with a special compost sticker. The grounds are in high demand during spring so you may want to call ahead & reserve a bag.

## Gardener Gatherings

Places To Go

Things To Learn

### What & Where

Landscape Basics Seminar  
Plymouth Library

**April 6 10:00 am**

call 453-0750 ext. 4

deadline for registration is March 23

Matthaei Botanical Gardens  
Spring Plant Sale

**May 4, 5 & 6**

call 734-998-7061 for directions & details

Detroit News & Free Press  
Spring Perennial Ex-Change

**May 11 or 17**

call 313-222-6400 for directions & correct date

Contact us at 734-416-0866 or earthen-

# What You Should Know About Fall-Invading Ladybugs



by Tom Ellis

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(This is a reprint of a 2000 MSU fact sheet)

There are several species of ladybird beetles, or more commonly called ladybugs, that look to houses, apartments and other buildings as a place to hibernate during the winter months. They have been bothersome, at times, but until last year the large numbers of them entering buildings was not all that common or widespread.

By and large the vast majority of the ladybugs invading buildings in Michigan the last couple of years is called the multi-colored Asian ladybird beetle or more conveniently the Asian ladybug. It was introduced from Japan to help manage aphids, scale, greenbugs and other soft-bodied leaf feeding insects in the southern United States several years ago. This ladybug comes in many shades of orange (thus its name) and has a variable number of spots or no spots at all on its wing covers. It can be identified most easily by a black mark resembling an "M" on the upper (dorsal) of its thorax (body region between abdomen and head).

The behavior of the Asian ladybug is a little different than our native species. Most notably, they like to hibernate in cavities, together in great numbers (the more the merrier) and they bite when handled.

## Why so many in 2000?

There were extremely large populations produced in 2000 all across the Great

Lakes Region. Why? There was an enormous population explosion of the ladybugs principal prey, the aphid. The reason for this was because weather conditions were perfect for aphid reproduction and survival during the summer of 2000. So, lots of food for the Asian ladybug produced tremendous number of ladybugs by summers end.

## Will there be that many in 2001?

Aphids did not have the reproductive success they had in 2000. However, there have been large populations of Asian ladybugs reported feeding on prey in soy bean fields and in commercial fruit orchards. The forecast currently is to expect large populations of Asian ladybugs moving to buildings in many parts of the state this autumn. While it may not be as widespread throughout the region, some populations in certain localities may be high. In a nutshell, populations last year were enormous and even though there might be a significant reduction this fall the numbers will probably still seem like a lot!

## Are they harmful or just a nuisance?

Ladybugs are predators, which means they eat other animals. In this case, other insects. So they cause no harm in the building. An orange liquid is expelled when Asian ladybugs are crushed. This fluid can stain some surfaces and fabrics. The Asian ladybug might take a nip out of your finger if handled. If you get nipped, clean and treat bite with an antibiotic as a precaution against a secondary infection. There have been a couple of cases of allergies linked to Asian ladybugs. The

patients experienced itchy eyes, sneezing, congestion and a runny nose.

### What can folks do?

Dealing with ladybugs in the house is an emotional conundrum for many people. Ladybugs are one of the few insects you grew up with that you actually like! We even have a childhood rhyme about ladybugs. On the other hand, fondness or not, we tend to get apprehensive when large numbers of any insect invade our space. And for many of the good citizens of Michigan the little bugs wore out their welcome last fall. Household insecticides will kill ladybugs, but there is a practical problem. Over the course of the fall when they enter the house and during the winter when they wake up from hibernation and find their way into your home you would potentially be spraying on a daily basis. So, that's probably not the best option. Why? You will be spraying insecticides often, you will be spraying insecticides on walls, windows, and countertops. The house is closed up and residual insecticide may continue to re-circulate throughout your house or apartment. And you know what? You will still have to clean up the dead ladybugs and dispose of them. Those that are killed and not removed provide potential food sources for other species of scavenging insects. We encourage folks to rely on fly swatters, wash rags and, best of all, dust buster-type vacuums or any vacuum that has a dirt trap that can be emptied. Sucking the ladybugs into a conventional vacuum bag does not guarantee that they will be killed. Those that aren't will probably crawl out through the exhaust once they've gath-

ered their senses.

Finding where they are massing is not always easy or practical in the fall. These areas are often accessed by getting through the siding, soffits, cracks and crevices, etc. However, when warm weather is here to stay in the spring and all the ladybugs have dispersed is a good time to examine the exterior of the home and other buildings to determine and repair points of possible entry.



Hospices of Henry Ford  
*Needs Your Help*  
to continue the

## 2002 "Butterfly Bouquet" Bud Vase Drive

Hospices of Henry Ford has an ongoing program to collect new or used bud vases to create "Butterfly Bouquets" to cheer hospice patients. The staff does this in cooperation with the generosity of Vanessa's Flowers in Plymouth, who donate the flowers & **people like you** who donate the vases. This program has been a blessing to many patients in their final days.

*Your Bud Vase Donations  
Are Greatly Needed & Appreciated!*

All donations can be dropped off at:  
260 Union Street, Plymouth MI 48170  
or

if you have questions or would like to  
volunteer your time to the program

**please call: (734) 354 - 3372**

