



Gardening for Ladybirds

Ladybirds in Scotland like several different habitats, and the best way you can make your garden as friendly as possible to as many different species, is to create as many of the different types as you can. Fortunately, it isn't difficult and you don't need to make much of each habitat to make it attractive to ladybirds in the area.

Don't forget about hibernating ladybirds. Many of them use the same areas as they do in the summer, but they find sheltered spots such as in leaf litter or under grass tussocks. It's important not to be too tidy, in case you accidentally move ladybirds out of your school grounds. You can also build a few hibernation hotels. These should be placed in sheltered, cool spots and provide ideal habitats for ladybirds, and also hibernating bees and butterflies.

Grasslands and wildflower meadows

Many species like grasslands and wildflower meadows, from the tussocky wild areas with nettles, docks and knapweed, through to meadows sown with wildflower seed mixes. You can attract many different species by leaving some corners to go wild, or planting wildflowers.

If you sow wildflower seeds, do bear in mind that the plants still need looking after. The area should be cut once a year (usually around September) and have the cuttings removed, so that there is space for the new seeds to grow. If you leave an area to go wild, it will fill with whatever seeds are already in the soil, and generally doesn't need much looking after. The advantages of this is that the habitat is also favoured by hibernating ladybirds, so you don't want to cut and remove the dead flowers.

Deciduous trees and hedges

Several Ladybird species in Scotland have a strong association with deciduous trees and hedgerows. Favourite species are Oak, Ash, Lime and Sycamore. All these species can grow very big, so you don't need to plant many to provide good habitat. They can also be complemented by smaller species such as Rowan, Cherry and Birch which also provide great habitat for birds and other insects. If you don't have room for these large tree species, try planting a hedgerow instead. Use a mix of 5 different species if possible, such as Hawthorn, Elder, Dog Rose, Blackthorn, Holly and/or Hazel.

Many of the Scottish species of ladybirds also hibernate in leaf litter from both deciduous and conifer trees, so avoiding sweeping up all the leaves in autumn is another good way to provide for your ladybirds. You don't have to leave everything, a few patches under the trees should be enough.

Conifer trees

Like their names suggest, the Pine and Larch ladybirds depend on conifer trees, particularly Larch and Scots Pine. As with the deciduous trees above, you don't need to plant many to make a good habitat, but do try to plant them together rather than spread out over the school. Larch and Pine don't grow as big as the deciduous species above, but they do grow quite quickly.

The cool and damp provided by conifer trees in winter makes an ideal hibernation spot for more species than just the Pine and Larch ladybirds. The cracks in the bark and the needles on the floor provides shelter for the Orange, Striped and Eyed ladybirds.

Heather

If you are in an area that has records of the Hieroglyphic ladybird, it might be worth trying to create a small heather heathland, as it is thought that this ladybird is decreasing in population due to loss of habitat. It is entirely dependent on heather, eating the larvae of the heather leaf beetle and hibernating in plant litter under heather plants. They use all species of heather, so you could create a rockery of different heather plants, planting them close together, so they will grow into quite dense bushes and give shelter and protection to any Hieroglyphic ladybirds that come across your heathland.