Lady beetles are one of the best-known beneficial predatory insects worldwide. They feed on soft-bodied insects such as aphids and mealybugs. They also feed on small insect larvae, eggs, and phytophagous mites, serving as effective biocontrol agents for many agricultural crops.

Lady beetles are multivoltine (have many generations per year). Adults are round to oval, dome-shaped, and some species are brightly colored. Larvae range from 0.09 to 0.33 inches in length and are dark in color with cream-colored lines. The pupa is cream-colored, oval with dark spots, and can measure 0.12 inches wide and 0.16 inches in length.

These insect predators can effectively control many pests that affect vineyards; however, their presence in grape clusters during harvest may affect wine’s taste. That occurs mainly with Harmonia axyrid, a species that excretes an unpleasant body liquid as a defense mechanism when threatened, thus contaminating the fruit. Furthermore, when H. axyrid individuals get crushed with grapes during juice processing, they impart a bitter sour and musty flavor. Therefore, their use as biocontrol agents should be avoided just prior to and during grape harvest.

By Laura Laiton Jimenez

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