

COASTAL GARDENER
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Q: I have small (approx. one-half inch long) black and orange “alligators” crawling over my orange tree. What are they? Should I be concerned?

A: What you have described is most likely the larval stage of “ladybird beetles.” Both the larval stage and adult ladybird beetle are beneficial. They prey mainly on aphids, but will also feed on scale insects, whitefly larva, mealybugs, spider mites, insect eggs, and other small insects.

If you find ladybird beetles or larva on your plants, that is an indication that you also have one or more of the above mentioned plant pests on the same plant. If the plant can tolerate the aphid, mealybug, etc. infestation, it is best to allow “nature” to take its course, as, in time, the ladybird beetles will suppress the pest infestation.

Unfortunately, many times the pest infestation gets out of hand before the ladybirds arrive and become present in sufficient numbers to adequately suppress the pest. In this situation you may have to treat the plant with a plant protection product to prevent the pest from causing economic or aesthetic damage to your garden landscape. Fortunately, there are now plant protection products on the market, which are “soft” on predators and parasites while still controlling the pest. Bt products and products containing imidacloprid are examples of “soft chemicals.” Check with your garden store professional and read the labels when selecting such a product and follow label directions for best results.

Q: My lawn has developed a serious infestation of oxalis weed. It appears to be slowly taking over the lawn. How can I control this weed short of starting over with a new lawn?

A: Actually, starting over will only temporarily get rid of your problem. If your lawn is in bad shape, starting over with a new lawn may be the best solution. However, if oxalis has been present for some time, there is a seed reservoir present, which will provide new seedlings to infest your new lawn for some years to come.

The best control is a combination of broadleaf herbicides, which will selectively kill out the oxalis and other broadleaf weeds. This treatment may have to be done several times the first year to get the problem under control. Then at least an annual

treatment will be necessary to keep your lawn free of oxalis and other broadleaf weeds.

Along with the weed control a regular fertilizer program should be put in place to keep the grass vigorous. A healthy lawn helps compete with and keep out potential invading weeds.

When using herbicides for lawn weed control, be careful when applying the materials especially around plants at the edge of the lawn. Broadleaf weed killers can have unintended consequences to shrubs, flowers and trees at the edge of the lawn. Always read and follow product label instructions for best results.

Send your landscape and garden questions to: The Coastal Gardener, 624-A West Foster Road, Santa Maria, CA 93455.