What is That UGLY Thing??
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I receive emails from growers and homeowners, often with pictures, asking for the pest or the damage to their fruit and foliage to be identified. Depending on the photographic skills of the sender, most times it is fairly easy to do. (Fuzzy pictures don’t lend themselves to easy identification even with my glasses on.) This past year I received some pictures of insects from growers. With one the insect in question was the larvae stage of the lady beetle, specifically, the Multicolored Asian Lady beetle, *Harmonia axyridis*. Not exactly a strikingly beautiful insect at this stage but a very beneficial one none the less. The other was a small black lady beetle-looking insect which was the *Stethorus punctum* – a wonderful predator of mites. In both cases I wrote back to the growers telling them what the insects were, the ‘bad’ insects that they feed on, the life cycle of the predators and a link to Cornell’s website with pictures of what the other life stages look like. Unfortunately in both cases the insects met a quick death after the pictures were taken. When asked why, the answers were similar – didn’t want to take any chances of additional problems, and, it looked like a bad insect.

Looks can be deceiving. It is the larvae stage of many predators that are voracious feeders and in some cases it is not a very pretty life stage. This is a picture of the larval stage of the *Stethorus punctum* feeding on 2-spotted spider mites. The larval stage of the lady beetle is similar in its lack of attractiveness. The *Stethorus punctum* larvae can feed on as many as 75 spider mites per day while the adults feed on upwards of 100 per day! This is one insect you want to encourage to stay and reproduce in your orchard. Not an insect you want to destroy. *Stethorus punctum* will overwinter in the orchard as adults under fallen leaves or nearby under brush. They emerge in the spring, move to the trees, lay eggs on the undersides of leaves and actively feed on mites into the fall. Where does the 2-spotted spider mite overwinter? In brush and litter under the fruit trees and on the tree under bark scales. They will move into the trees once the food source is used up, the weeds are mowed or a drought causes their food source to dry up.

So what about eggs? Many times eggs are all that are seen when scouting and it isn’t always easy to identify whose eggs they are. Looking at these two pictures, can you tell which the Multi-colored Asian lady beetle eggs are and which are the Two-spotted spider mite eggs? If not, do you spray an ovicide assuming they are a ‘bad’ pest, or do you wait to see what develops? The answer is – wait to see what develops. Better yet, learn to identify the different stages of fruit pests and of beneficial insects & mites.

In this case the picture on the left is the Multi-colored Asian lady beetle eggs and the picture on the right is of two-spotted spider mite eggs.
There are many sources of great information (with pictures) to help you identify beneficials and pests as well as understanding their life cycles. These include:

- Cornell’s on-line source at [http://www.biocontrol.entomology.cornell.edu/index.php](http://www.biocontrol.entomology.cornell.edu/index.php);
- IPM pocket guides from Michigan State University covering apples, grapes, highbush blueberries, stone fruits and natural enemies of crops, which can be purchased at [http://www.ipm.msu.edu/publications](http://www.ipm.msu.edu/publications); and
- a newly translated publication titled “Diseases, pests and beneficial organisms of strawberry, raspberry and blueberry” which can be purchased from the American Phytopathological Society at [http://www.apsnet.org/apsstore/shopapspress/Pages/02301.aspx](http://www.apsnet.org/apsstore/shopapspress/Pages/02301.aspx).
- And if you are still in doubt, simply snap a picture, send it to me (mary.concklin@ucon.edu) and I will help you learn.

Remember, scouting trees and plants for pests AND beneficials is a standard IPM practice, and one that is covered in the New England Tree Fruit Management Guide and the New England Small Fruit Guide.