

Dear Spud GP

I've noticed a few leaves getting chewed on plants around the edge of the paddock, but I can't see any insects on there - what's causing this?

Spike



# ASK THE SPUD GP



Dear Spike

This looks like 28-spot lady beetle (*Epilachna* spp.) damage. Not all ladybeetles are beneficial predators; 28-spots, sometimes called potato ladybird beetles, are very definitely plant eaters.

The adults are easy to see, being large orange ladybeetles with a variable number of black spots (not always 28, but quite a few) and a fine covering of soft hairs.

While the adults can certainly damage plants, the larvae are not only a lot better camouflaged, but voracious eaters.

The larvae are initially tiny, hatching out of clusters of 20 to 30 eggs laid on the undersides of leaves. They are nothing like the adult beetles, the larvae looking like small yellow grubs topped with a cluster of bristling spines. The spines are initially pale but darken and thicken as the larvae

mature.

Larvae mostly feed on the leaf undersides, where they chew ribbed "windows" into the leaves between the larger veins.

Although 28-spot ladybeetles are not usually a major commercial pest, they can cause significant damage if large populations develop. Avoidance is the best control, so removing alternate hosts - including cucurbits and solanaceous weeds - is the first step in good management.