

# Milkweed Bugs

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**Species:** *fasciatus*  
**Genus:** *Oncopeltus*  
**Family:** Lygaeidae  
**Suborder:** Heteroptera  
**Order:** Hemiptera  
**Class:** Insecta (Insects)  
**Phylum:** Arthropoda  
**Kingdom:** Animalia



## Conditions for Customer Ownership

We are a USDA compliant facility and hold all necessary permits to transport our organisms. Each state is assisted by the USDA to determine which organisms can be transported across state lines. Some organisms may require end-user permits. Please contact your local regulatory authorities with questions or concerns. To access permit conditions, [click here](#).

**Never purchase living specimens without having a disposition strategy in place.** Live specimens should not be released into the wild! Please dispose of any unwanted organisms using the guidelines below.

## Primary Hazard Considerations

Wash your hands thoroughly after you handle milkweed bugs or eggs.

## Availability

- Milkweed bugs are farmed and therefore are available year round. In the wild, they are typically found May through October.
- We over-pack each order of milkweed bugs and eggs. It is normal to have some deceased milkweed bugs and eggs in the container. You will receive at least the quantity of live milkweed bugs and eggs stated on the container.
- Milkweed bugs are shipped in a paper container with a moist paper towel. Adults are black and orange in color with wings. Move your milkweed bugs to a new home the day they arrive and provide them with food and water.
- Eggs are provided attached to a piece of cotton inside a plastic vial. Eggs will hatch within a few days of arrival and should be moved to an appropriate enclosure promptly. Eggs are oblong. They are initially yellow in color, changing to orange, and then bright red before hatching. Nymphs are wingless and similar in color to adults, but with different markings. They are pale yellow after molting and become more orange with age.

## Captive Care

### Habitat:

Use a paper lined, fine mesh netted enclosure or a plastic container with a secure lid. Choose a container cautiously because nymph hatchlings are very small and will be able to escape through tiny cracks, openings or typical aquarium screen tops. You can put a piece of cloth between the cage and the lid to prevent the bugs from escaping while still allowing air to get in. To observe the life cycle, provide adult bugs with cotton or filter floss—they will use this as substrate to lay eggs.

### Care:

In captivity, feed them raw, unsalted, shelled sunflower seeds and/or milkweed bug food. Place the seeds in a shallow dish inside the enclosure and replace every two weeks or as needed. Since milkweed bugs can drown in a dish of standing water always provide a shallow dish containing a water dampened cotton ball or sponge. Do not let it dry out.

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## Information

- **Method of reproduction:** Sexual. Adults mate end to end. They may stay attached for 30 minutes or more. Once the mating is complete the female will lay her eggs in small clutches of around fifteen eggs. In most cases the adult females will produce around three broods during one mating season.
- **Determining sex:** On the underside of the abdomen, the female has one black strip and two black dots. The male has two thick black strips.

## Life Cycle

Eggs hatch within 3–5 days and young wingless nymphs emerge. The nymphs molt five times in the six weeks that follow. After the final molt the nymphs become winged adults. The average life expectancy of the adult milkweed bug is approximately six weeks.

## Wild Habitat

Milkweed bugs are native species in North America. They are found in temperate fields and meadows containing milkweed or dogbane. They have few predators because their food source, milkweed, produces a taste that is unpleasant to predators. Therefore, most predators avoid them.

## Special Notes

In the course of feeding, these bugs accumulate toxins from the milkweed, which can potentially sicken any predators. The milkweed bugs' bright colors are a warning of their toxicity.

## Disposition

We do not recommend releasing any laboratory animal into the wild, and especially not insects that are not native to the environment.

- Adoption is the preferred disposition for any living animal.
- If the insects must be euthanized at the end of study, follow one of these procedures:
  - Put them into a container or bag and freeze for 48 hours.
  - Place the organism in 70% isopropyl alcohol for 24 hours.
- A deceased specimen should be disposed of as soon as possible. Consult your school's recommended procedures for disposal. In general, dead insects should be handled as little as possible or with gloves, wrapped in an opaque plastic bag that is sealed (tied tightly) before being placed in a general garbage container away from students.