



Some Bugs are Welcome in the Garden

Our gardens attract insects. Some gardeners lament this fact of nature, but they shouldn't. There are considerably more good bugs than bad bugs calling your garden home. Beneficial insects play a valuable role in reducing the population of those insects that cause damage to your plants. And many beneficial insects act as pollinators, too.

Learn to recognize these good bugs so a sighting will cause a jump for joy instead of a race for a bottle of insecticide. Encourage them to take up residence in your landscape by choosing plants that attract them.

Ladybugs

Ladybugs eat aphids, thrips, mealybugs and scale insects. We can all identify a ladybug, but can you recognize its larvae? Young larvae eat more pests than adults! Larvae are black with orange markings.



Perennials that attract ladybugs include yarrow, basket of gold (*Alyssum saxatilis*), butterfly weed and speedwell. Herbs that attract them include dill, coriander and fennel.

Lacewings

Adult lacewings feed on nectar and pollen but their larvae, nicknamed aphid lions, have a voracious appetite for aphids. They also eat spider mites, thrips, leafhoppers and mealybugs. Lacewing larvae resemble tiny alligators.

To invite lacewings into your garden, plant fern-leaf yarrow, prairie sunflower (*Helianthus*), tansy, cosmos, dill, coriander and fennel.

Big Eyed Bugs

Big eyed bugs are small – barely ¼ inch long. They are grayish beige, oval shaped and have large bulging eyes. Their diet consists of leafhoppers, spider mites and insect eggs.

Goldenrod, cosmos, marigolds, fennel and spearmint will attract big eyed bugs to your garden.

Parasitic Wasps

There are many species of parasitic wasps. Instead of stinging humans, they use their stingers to deposit their eggs in the bodies of insect pests. When their eggs hatch, the young eat their host from the inside. Most wasps choose a specific host for their eggs but the list includes caterpillars, beetles, flies and scale insects.

Perennials that attract parasitic wasps include yarrow, masterwort (*Astrantia major*), statice, and *Sedum kamtschaticum*. Plant the annuals alyssum, cosmos, marigolds and zinnias to encourage parasitic wasps into your garden. Herbs that attract them include dill, coriander, fennel, lemon balm and common thyme.

Hoverflies

Hoverflies look like little bees. They are easy to identify by the way they hover and then quickly dart away. The larvae of hoverflies are aphid-eating machines and also feed on small caterpillars, thrips and scale insects.

Hoverflies will gladly move into your landscape if you offer a variety of these perennials: yarrow, carpet bugleweed, basket of gold, goldenrod, masterwort, English lavender, stonecrop, and speedwell. Annuals include alyssum, cosmos, marigolds and zinnias. Herbs to plant include dill, coriander, fennel, lemon balm, spearmint and parsley.

Damsel Bugs

Using their front legs to grab their prey, damsel bugs eat soft-bodied insects like aphids, caterpillars, thrips and leafhoppers. They are oval, dull tan or gray and their bodies appear flattened.

Plant goldenrod, cosmos, marigolds, fennel and spearmint to invite damsel bugs into your beds and borders.

Keep beneficial insects at home

Once you've planted the appropriate annuals, herbs and perennials and attracted beneficial insects into your landscape, follow these tips to keep them.

- 1) Design low-maintenance borders so you won't disturb beneficial insects hiding in the ground or mulch while caring for the plants.
- 2) Make sure there are nectar-rich plants blooming throughout the season so there will be a constant source of food.
- 3) Include a birdbath or water feature so they won't leave in search of water.
- 4) Accept less than perfection. A few holes on vegetable plants won't detrimentally affect their yield. A few damaged leaves on perennials may hardly be noticed.
- 5) Use safer alternatives if you must use insecticides. Choose insecticidal soaps, horticultural oils, and products for specific pests. Always apply them according to the labels on the package.

Create a habitat that will encourage more beneficial insects to inhabit your landscape and you'll find yourself enjoying your gardens more and reaching for insecticides less.



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