

The good types of CREEPY CRAWLIES

Question: How do I create a garden environment that is welcoming to beneficial insects? Which insects are beneficial to have in my garden?

Answer: There are many insects that you absolutely do want in your garden.

In order to attract beneficial insects, plant flowers where the pollen is readily available. Plant a variety of flowers, with different heights and different bloom times. The goal is to have something in bloom throughout the entire gardening season. By interspersing vegetables, herbs and flowers you will attract beneficial insects.

There are three main categories of beneficial insects: pollinators, parasitoids and predators.

I think most gardeners are familiar with the common pollinators: honeybees, bumblebees, mason bees, butterflies and syrphid flies.

Parasitoids are insects that parasitize other insects. The immature stages of parasitoids develop on or within its host, eventually killing it. Parasitoids may attack all stages of their host (eggs, larvae, nymphs, pupae, adults). Parasitic wasps are a good example of parasitoids.

However, I would like to focus on the predators since home gardeners are in the late stages of the summer growing season. Predators capture and eat other insects. The idea of a predatory beneficial insect eliminating a harmful insect sounds helpful as we try to keep our gardens healthy and attractive.

The most commonly recognized predatory insects are Lady beetles (ladybugs). They control aphids, mealybugs, scales, leafhoppers, spider mites, and other soft-bodied insect pests as well as insect eggs.

There are over 400 species but the most well-known species are usually the orange or red with black markings ladybugs. Ladybugs can consume more than 5,000 aphids in their lifetime. They will overwinter as adults. Eggs are laid in clusters on the underside of leaves



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and branches.

Green lacewings will control aphids, leafhoppers, spider mites and thrips. They can be found on grass, weeds and shrubs. These insects are beautiful. The wings look as though they have a lace design on them. They will overwinter as adults and there may be up to four generations a year depending on the temperature.

Hover flies (syrphid flies) control aphids, scales, and thrips. Hover fly larvae are flattened, legless maggots with no distinct head and a tapered body. They can be yellow, green, or brown. Adults hover over flowers before landing to feed on nectar and pollen. They are often mistaken for bees or wasps because they are similar in color. They overwinter as larvae, pupae, or adults depending on the species. Their eggs are laid on aphid-infested plant parts.

Big-eyed bugs control aphids, flea beetles, leafhoppers and spider mites. Adults and nymphs are oval, somewhat flattened, usually brownish or yellowish, and have a wide head with large, bulging eyes. They are commonly found on low-growing plants and crops.

Dragonflies control mosquitoes, gnats, flies and just about any flying insect small enough for them to catch. Dragonflies manage to snatch their targets in midair more than 95% of the time. Their appetite is bottomless. There are numerous species but they are generally ¾-2 inches.

Praying mantids (praying mantis) can be green, brown, or yellow in color. They control aphids, flies, and beetles. Praying mantis are excellent predators of harmful insects. The problem is that they will eat anything, including the beneficial insects and even each other!



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Ground beetles are voracious predators which control slugs, snails, caterpillars, cutworms, thrips, crickets, earwigs and spider mites.

about an inch long.

Ground beetles are known for their long legs and powerful mandibles which enable them to be successful predators. The adult beetles hunt primarily on the soil surface, but will occasionally climb into the foliage in search of prey. Both adults and larvae are active at night. There are over 2,500 species in the United States.

Some gardeners automatically reach for an insecticide when trying to eliminate harmful insects, but the problem with that is the insecticide will also eliminate the beneficial insects.



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Lady beetles, commonly called ladybugs, help control aphids, mealybugs, scales, leafhoppers, spider mites, and other soft-bodied insect pests as well as insect eggs.

By creating a welcoming garden environment for the beneficial insects, we allow nature to do as intended with the good guys eating the bad guys.

Do you have a gardening or insect question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu or 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.