



GENERAL INFORMATION: **BENEFICIAL INSECTS**

Insects don't just harm gardens – in fact, many protect and help them thrive, by killing pests and pollinating crops.

HOW DO BENEFICIAL INSECTS HELP?

Insects can be beneficial in many different ways. Some, like ladybugs, eat a significant amount of pests, helping to keep a good balance of insects in the garden ecosystem. Others, like tiny brachonid wasps, parasitize pests, laying eggs on or inside of them that will hatch into even more beneficial insects. Finally, some insects pollinate crops, helping them to create fruit.

ATTRACTING BENEFICIAL INSECTS

Beneficial insects tend to thrive in organic gardens, due to crop diversity and a lack of harmful chemicals. Beneficial insects need shelter, food, and water to survive. Here are some ways you can attract beneficial insects to your garden:

Plant a diverse garden

Diverse plants provide diverse bugs, which attract beneficial insects. Additionally, planting at least a few perennial plants provides a place for beneficials to overwinter.

Include herbs and flowers

Many beneficial insects eat pollen and nectar in their adult stage. Herbs in particular are especially well suited to provide food for beneficial insects, as their flowers are small, like most beneficials.



THESE LADYBUG LARVAE EAT THEIR WEIGHT IN APHIDS EVERY DAY



THIS GARDEN SPIDER HAS CAUGHT A CABBAGE WORM MOTH

Avoid spraying pesticides whenever possible

Even organic pesticides can have a negative impact on beneficial insect populations. Use pesticides as a last resort, and spray in the morning or evening to avoid affecting bees and other pollinators. Often, pest levels need to reach a critical mass before beneficials arrive, so give the garden a little time to work out a system, before interfering.

Avoid non-selective organic pesticides

Most chemical pesticides and some organic pesticides are non-selective, meaning they are a broad-spectrum killer of many insects. Selective pesticides, which target specific types of insects, are safer.

Create a water feature

Beneficial insects need water just like any other living organism. Try a fountain, bird bath, or a small dish with a few pebbles. Just be sure to replace the water regularly to discourage mosquitos from breeding.



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AN ADULT PRAYING MANTIS EATS ANY INSECT IT CROSSES

Identify bugs before squashing

Some beneficial insects, like ladybug larvae, can look downright scary! Keep in mind that even garden spiders have a helpful purpose in the garden, and take some time to identify insects before destroying them.