



## Beneficial Insects



Not all insects are pests! “Beneficial insects” actually help gardeners by naturally managing pest populations. They are classified as either predators who consume pests or parasites who live in or off of a pest until its death. Predators are usually general feeders who consume many different types of pests while parasites are specific, usually working to control only one target pest.

Gardeners can promote effective pest management by attracting and protecting beneficial insects. The first step in enticing natural predators to nest in your garden is to stop using pesticides. Beneficial insects are much less tolerant of pesticides than are the destructive insects that you hope to eradicate, and you can do a huge disservice to the ecosystem by unintentionally eliminating natural predators. Second, planting a border of flowering plants will attract and provide shelter for beneficial insects. Plants with tiny flowers (like yarrow and dill) are often rich in nectar. Third, weed selectively. Some “weeds” such as Queen Anne’s lace and dandelions are actually favorites of honeybees, ladybugs, and other garden helpers. Fourth, a small “insect bath” with gravel “islands” will provide insects with a fresh drinking water source on the hottest days of the summer. Finally, if you are short on space and looking to dedicate every inch of your garden to food production, try to include vegetables and herbs that will sustain natural predators. Among these are members of the carrot family (carrots, dill, parsley), and the cabbage family (cabbage, broccoli, kale, mustard, radishes). Below are some of the most common beneficial insects to watch for in your garden:



**Honey Bees:** Though neither predator nor parasite, honey bees are important for pollinating garden plants and ensuring a productive season. Honey bees are attracted to a variety of flowers (clover, marigolds, sunflowers, zinnia), herbs (fennel, lavender, rosemary, sage, thyme), and vegetables (melons, pumpkins, squash, strawberries).



**Hoverflies / Syrphid Flies:** Hoverflies mimic wasps but are harmless to humans. Their larvae, however, are voracious predators of aphids and thrips which are common garden pests. Adult hoverflies are also helpful in pollination. To attract them, cultivate alyssum, chamomile, parsley, calendula and statice.



**Lacewings:** Lacewing larvae will attack aphids, mealybugs, and small caterpillars. Gardeners can lure them with dill, as well as cornflowers, cosmos, and statice.

**Ladybugs:** A single ladybug can consume 50 to 60 aphids a day. Adult ladybugs and their black and orange larvae also feed on mites and scale insects. Favorite plants include caraway, carrots, cilantro, dill, fennel, and yarrow.

