

Attracting Beneficial Insects

Most people would not go out of their way to attract insects to their yards, but if you enjoy growing your own fruits, vegetables and flowers, you should learn how some insects can be beneficial to your garden.

To begin with, we need to learn to identify beneficial insects in their different life stages. Most of us know that lady beetle adults feed on aphids, but did you know that lady beetle larvae consume many more aphids than the adults? Most of us, however, would not recognize the black, alligator-like larvae and our first reaction would be to get rid of them.

Many beneficial insects are already present in and around your yard. One of the easiest ways to help them survive is to cut down your pesticide use. Pesticides kill many kinds of insects, not just the one you are targeting, as many of the beneficials will lay their eggs near aphid colonies. Also, scientists have recently discovered that adult parasitic wasps feed on the honeydew produced by aphids.

One way to attract beneficials is to leave a few pests as food. If you can tolerate a little damage initially, you will soon have lacewings, lady beetles, flower flies and parasitic wasps hovering around your plants. They will switch to other aphids that are more serious pests (such as rose aphids) if infestations occur.

Flowers produce nectar and pollen, which are used as food by the adults of many beneficial insects. An example is the annual flower, alyssum, which attracts flower flies and tiny parasitic wasps. By supplying food for the adults, you will have more of the beneficial larvae.

Flower fly adults are often called hover flies because they hover around flowers, performing important pollination functions. They are yellow and black and are often mistaken for bees or wasps, but they do not sting. They have only two wings, while bees and wasps have four. The larvae are pale green legless worms that feed on aphids, thrips and other plant-sucking pests.

The larvae of parasitic wasps eat a number of different pest insects, such as caterpillars, leafhoppers, or cicadas. Parasitic wasps generally do not sting unless they are threatened or handled. They use their stinger to lay eggs inside other insects.

The public is invited to learn more about beneficial insects at a ***FREE*** class being sponsored by the Chisago County Master Gardeners on Tuesday evening, June 27. Bud Markhardt, Professor at the University of MN, and member of the Board of Directors for the MN Institute for Sustainable Agriculture and the Organic Advisory Task Force, MN Department of Ag. will be speaking on ***'Beneficial Insects in Your Garden'***. Many who heard him at our Gardening Bonanza in March asked us to have him back. The class will be held at the Senior Center in North Branch on June 27 beginning promptly at 6:30 pm. You can call the Extension office at 651-674-4417 if you need directions.

PLANT CLINICS: Volunteer Master Gardeners will be available Mondays from 4-7 at the Extension Office in North Branch at 38780 Eight Ave. to answer your gardening

questions. You can also call 651-674-4417 during these hours to speak with a Master Gardener. Samples can be dropped off during the day on Monday if you cannot stop in during clinic hours. *Please note MONDAY is the only day you can drop off samples, as there is no longer staff at the North Branch Office who can answer gardening questions.*

VOICE MAIL: You can leave a question for a volunteer Master Gardener at 651-674-4417. Depending on the volume of calls, they try to respond within a couple of days. During office hours ask for the Master Gardener voicemail, after hours, select ext. 18.

Submitted by Starr Carpenter
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