

Beneficial Insects in the Garden

So often we find ourselves scouting for the bad bugs in the garden and we often forget, or don't even realize that most insects are neutral or even helpful to us in our everyday lives. According to the National Pesticide Information Center there are nearly one million known insect species. Out of all those insects, only about one to three percent are ever considered pests. While you scout for caterpillars chomping on your tomatoes or beetles biting your cucumber keep an eye out for these good insects and work to make your garden a habitat they want to live in!



Green Lacewings

Green lacewings are a predatory species eating leafhoppers, aphids, soft scale, small caterpillars, whiteflies and many insect pest eggs.

Ladybeetles

Ladybeetles, or ladybugs, eat aphids, fruit flies, thrips and mites.



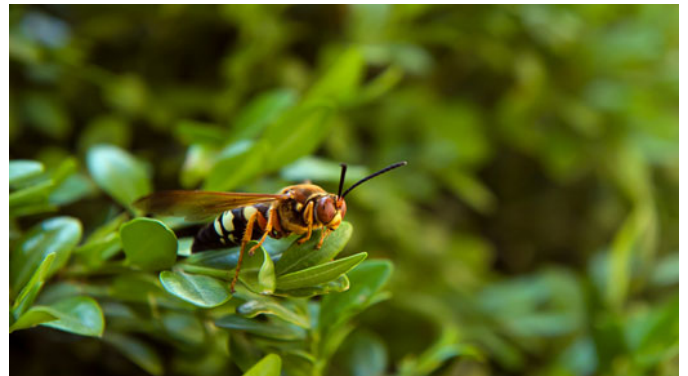


Spiders

Although not technically insects, spiders are still our friends in the garden. Spiders eat a wide array of insects but unlike other beneficials they are not selective. They will catch and eat “good” and “bad” bugs alike.

Wasps

Most people would prefer no wasps in their garden but many are beneficial! Both predatory wasps and parasitoid wasps prey upon caterpillars and other soft bodies insect pests.



Research shows many chemical sprays, including organic pesticides and those not labeled for insect control, like fungicides, can impact insects negatively. If you do need to use chemicals in your garden, do you best to target only the area with the problem and make sure you’re using the appropriate chemical for the job. A strong integrated pest management plan only utilizes chemical control as the final step. To help create a plan for you garden or to insure that you’re using the proper chemical call or e-mail our office (www.shawnee.ksu.edu).

While beneficial insects are wonderful to have in our garden, there are a few precautions gardeners should consider. The first is the purchase of beneficial insects to bring into your gardening space. While certain insects, like honey bees, are brought in along with their hive, most beneficials like ladybugs come to your home to be free released. The problem with this method is that there isn’t anything keeping them in your yard. They may feed on insects in your yard or they may visit your neighbor instead. It is

also critical to make sure your source is reputable and that the insects you are purchasing are healthy and suitable for our local ecosystem.

The next consideration is pest populations. If aphids are coating your milkweed plants, a ladybug or two are not going to totally solve the problem. Beneficials work best when pest populations are low. Think about beneficials now, as you plan your garden, not when you have a problem.