

Attracting Beneficial Bugs

Maintaining a pest-free garden can be difficult and frustrating. We've all been tempted to whip out the hard stuff after our peppers or pansies have been ravaged by a sudden explosion of aphids. And while many people assume a healthy garden means a perfect garden, that's just not true. Take a look at natural ecosystems. Predator-prey relationships are essential to maintaining interspecies balance, and your own garden should reflect that.

There will always be bugs.

Accepting that fact is the first step toward letting go of our pursuit of perfection and reliance on pesticides. Gardening is not an exercise in complete control because, time and time again, nature proves she cannot be controlled. Late frosts will kill your tomatoes. Spider mites will find your dahlias. Slugs will eat your hostas. It's just going to happen. But learning to work *with* nature instead of against it can give you the skills to overcome these challenges and create a healthy environment for you and your resident arthropods.

Harnessing the power of natural pest control means introducing and attracting beneficials (aka, the three P's) to your garden. **Pollinators** bump up food production rates and increase genetic diversity, while **predators** and **parasites** destroy the bad bugs through consumption and larval hosting. To create an environment that fosters healthy populations of all three, simply mimic patterns you see in the wild. Plant a diversity of trees, shrubs, and perennials for year-round nesting areas and protection from severe weather. Use natives whenever possible, and plant in large swaths to increase foraging efficiency. Make sure you also have multiple species blooming at all times throughout the growing season, paying particular attention to those early spring and late fall bloomers. And don't be afraid to sprinkle in some choice annuals for extra foraging potential. Beneficials often rely on nectar when pest populations run low, and the more food available in the immediate area, the longer they'll patrol your garden. They also need consistent, shallow, clean water sources - shallow being the key word here. Many of these insects are smaller than your fingernail, some nearly invisible to the naked eye, so they can easily drown in a few inches of water. Spread pea gravel along the bottom of a birdbath and place in a warm, sunny spot to make the perfect oasis for bees, butterflies, and other tiny bugs. Leave dead snags, leaf litter, and open patches of dirt for ground nesters like bumblebees, and take on kid-friendly projects like a bee box or insect hotel. And it's very important to use pesticides *only* when completely necessary, if at all. Not only do they kill the good bugs as well as the bad, but they also throw delicate ecosystems out of balance after just one application. Pests usually bounce back faster than beneficials because of their high reproduction rates, so while you may get immediate relief from those pesky aphids, they'll come back with a vengeance, leaving you stuck in a vicious circle of repeated pesticide applications. Be sure to check out our Pinterest site! There are lots of alternative home made pesticides out there (like the recipe below), and we've pinned them onto our "General Gardening Tips" board.

If you commit five to ten percent of your garden to beneficial habitat, you'll go far in the fight against pests - saving you time, money, and peace of mind. And learn to tolerate minor pest infestations, as it only means more food for the good guys. Feel like jump-starting your beneficial population? Most garden centers sell lady beetles and praying mantises in easy-release containers all summer long - another great kid-friendly activity!

NATURAL GARLIC, ONION & PEPPER INSECTICIDE

1 large, very sharp onion
3 cloves of garlic
1 tbsp hot sauce
Dash of chili powder
Dash of cayenne pepper
Biodegradable dish soap

- Chop onion and garlic into small pieces, then place all ingredients (except dish soap) into a blender full of water. Blend and strain twice. Compost solid waste or use as a soup base.
- Combine two inches of the liquid concentrate with one inch of biodegradable dish soap in a spray bottle. Top off with water and shake vigorously to mix. Spray every 5-7 days to control soft-bodied insects.
- Remaining concentrate can be stored in a refrigerator for up to a year, but a new batch should be made at the start of every growing season.

Common Plants That Attract Beneficials

	Lady Beetles <i>consume aphids, mites, and other soft-bodied insects</i>	Green Lacewing <i>consume small insects, beetles, and caterpillars</i>	Syrphid Flies <i>consume aphids and other small insects</i>	Predatory Bugs <i>consume many small insects</i>	Tachinid Flies <i>parasitize caterpillars, beetles, and other insects</i>	Parasitic Wasps <i>parasitize caterpillars and small insects</i>
Angelica	x	x				
Basket of Gold	x		x			
Buckwheat	x		x		x	
Chamomile	x	x	x		x	x
Cilantro	x	x	x			x
Cosmos		x	x	x		x
Dandelion	x	x				
Dill	x	x	x			x
Fennel	x	x	x	x		x
Goldenrod			x	x		
Lemon Balm			x		x	x
Linaria			x			x
Mallow		x	x			x
Marigold	x		x	x		x
Mint			x	x	x	x
Parsley			x		x	x
Potentilla	x		x			x
Queen Anne's Lace	x	x	x			x
Sedum			x			x
Sweet Alyssum			x			x
Tansy	x	x		x	x	x
Thyme			x		x	x
Yarrow	x	x	x			x

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