

## INSECTS FRIEND OR FOE?

We can assume that 99% of the bugs and insects in your garden are beneficial in some way. The negative stigma of insects is surprising considering that they are one of the most successful and adaptable organisms on this planet. A few favourite insects of mine (especially loved in the garden) are spiders and ladybugs.

Spiders are extraordinary predators in your garden devouring aphids, gypsy moths and caterpillars to name a few. I enjoy seeing spider webs with morning dew shining in the sunlight; their intricate web patterns are exquisite embroideries of silk.

Ladybugs and their tiny larvae are avid aphid hunters. Aphids form colonies along the buds and new growth of plants, exuding a sticky honeydew. Deformed leaves, shoots or flowers are signs of aphid damage. Ladybugs are a welcome friend in our gardens and protect our plants from aphids.

Generally these beneficial insects enjoy a supply of nectar and pollen along with their usual insect prey. You can keep their appetites satisfied by growing the following plants: alfalfa (*Medicago*), daisies (*Aster*), Queen Anne's lace (*Anthriscus sylvestris*), tickseed (*Coreopsis*), thyme (*Thymus*), yarrow (*Achillea*), spearmint (*Mentha*), coneflowers (*echinacea*) and numerous others.

Keep your plants healthy and flourishing by growing a diverse mix of flowering, fruiting and foliage plants. Stressed or weak plants send out a message for harmful insects saying "here I am, come and get me." Compost and mulch are key ingredients for healthy soil where plants can thrive. The richer the soil is in organic matter, the more helpful microorganisms develop.

Select your planting material to attract the wild crowd: insects, birds, toads, butterflies

etcetera. Think of your garden as a home for natural diversity and ecological balance.

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