

How to Attract Beneficial Insects to the

EDIBLE GARDEN



How to Attract Beneficial Insects to the Edible Garden



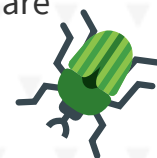
Not all insects found in the edible garden are out to eat and destroy your plants. Many are beneficial, acting as pollinators for your plants or preying on other unwelcome insects. Knowing which insects are helpful and respecting their roles in the ecosystem is valuable to a healthy, productive edible garden.





Bad Bugs: Predators and Parasitoids

Ladybugs are likely a gardener's best-known predatory insect. This small beetle with the red back and black spots is a voracious feeder, preying on pest insects such as aphids, spider mites, whiteflies, and various species of scale insects. If you see ladybugs congregating together on the stalk of a dill plant, check to see if the herb is covered in aphids – chances are, the beetles are chowing down and protecting your plant!



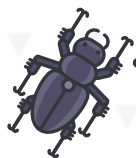
Lacewings are small, bright green insects with transparent wings. They may be a bit delicate-looking, but they are ferocious devourers of many types of what gardeners would term bad bugs, such as spider mites, leafhoppers, mealybugs, and some types of caterpillars.

Tachinid flies look a bit like tiny houseflies. Depending on the species, they are often brightly coloured, covered in bristly hairs, or striped. The larvae dine on other insect larvae, particularly that of grasshoppers, tent caterpillars and gypsy moths.

Damselflies and dragonflies are the beauties of the garden. The adults are easily identifiable by their large wings (four in all), compound eyes, and long abdomens. (You can tell them apart when they land: damselflies tuck their wings in close to their bodies, while dragonflies leave their spread out). Dragonflies excel at eating mosquitoes, while damselflies will down aphids, mites, and leafhoppers in large quantities.

Tiny parasitoid wasps (not to be confused with the large ones that may sting you when annoyed) such as trichogrammas lay their own eggs inside or on pests such as spruce budworms, aphids, and scale insects. When the miniature wasp larvae hatch, they consume the pests. Most parasitoid wasps are so small you wouldn't even realize they were hard at work, keeping the populations of other insects in check.

We may consider them pests in their own right, but the large predatory wasps (which include hornets and yellow jackets) are ruthless against several species of flies and caterpillars.



Good Bugs: Pollinators

Solitary bees, including bumblebees, mason bees, and leafcutter bees, are hardworking pollinators. They seek out nectar-rich flowers, such as those from cucumbers, summer and winter squash, and herbs such as dill and oregano.

Honeybees are also excellent pollinators and you'll likely have a few stop by your garden if there are hives being kept nearby.

Although caterpillars in general are usually looked upon as pests in the edible garden, you'll want to encourage this larval form of butterflies to your food landscape, (even if they may eat a plant or two along the way). Adult butterflies are prolific pollinators. It is useful to research how to identify both the larval and adult forms of common butterflies in your area. It may be desirable to also grow a few extra of the plants they love, just in case they decide they want to breed in your garden!

Bees and butterflies aren't the only insect pollinators to consider – some flies such as syrphids, moths, wasps, and beetles also help out in the edible garden in this capacity.



Ways to Encourage Beneficial Insects to the Garden

How do you invite beneficial insects to your edible garden so that they can help with pollination and pest control? It's necessary to make your garden a safe, healthy environment. There are several ways to do this:

1. Put away the pesticides, which can kill beneficial insects alongside pests.
2. Diversity is key. Plant many different types of plants, not just one or two. Plenty of variety can prevent your entire crop from being wiped out by a specific pest. You may lose one or two types of plants, but the blow will be cushioned by the fact that you've sown a huge variety of species. Plus, you're offering more selections for beneficial insects to explore!
3. Mix it up! Plant herbs and flowers in your vegetable garden beds, and near fruit trees and shrubs. Some flowers to try include: coneflowers (Echinacea), sunflowers, and black-eyed Susans. You may already have herbs such as dill, coriander, thyme, bergamot, and parsley in your edible garden – these are all attractive plants for pollinators. While pollinating insects are visiting nearby flowers, they may be more inclined to stop by your squash plants and help them along, as well.
4. If you need to dig, do it infrequently. Disturbing the soil can stir up or even destroy the eggs and larvae of beneficial insects that live in it.
5. For most pollinator insects, simple blooms will do. They prefer single flowers over fancy doubles – it's easier to reach the nectar or pollen!



