

Q: I have heard about gardening with good bugs. What are they and how can I get some?

A: Most of the insects that you find in your garden are helpers, not pests. The insects that help in controlling pest populations of damaging insects are called beneficials, or natural enemies. You can change your gardening practices in ways that encourage these good guys and help reduce the damaging insects, saving yourself money and helping the local environment!

The first thing step is to stop using general pesticides that kill the beneficials along with the pest insects. Many beneficial insects are very sensitive to pesticides and pesticide residue. Dispose of the pesticides through a hazardous waste collection site—if you just throw them out they have the potential of seeping into the soil or waterways. Be Very careful that you do not dump them down the drain. Many garden pesticides have dire consequences when they end up in our waterways.

The use of less toxic products may be indicated if you end with large populations of pests, although with patience, the good guys will show up to enjoy the feast you have left for them. The local, most commonly seen beneficials include Lady beetles: both the larvae and adults devour aphids; Lacewings: the larvae eat many insect pests; Syrphid flies: the larvae eat aphids; Parasitic mini-wasps: many species of these tiny helpers lay their eggs in pest insects such as caterpillars or aphids, which the emerging larvae destroy; and Spiders, all of whom are great outdoor helpers in reducing insect populations.

Many of these beneficials are most effective at reducing pest populations as larvae, and the larvae are often very different in appearance from the adults. Lacewings are a great case in point. If you would like to see good photos of the helpful beneficials, they are available for free on-line at <http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/NE/index.>, the Natural Enemies gallery.

You should also look at your garden and make sure that you have plants that are not attractive to pest insects. Plant resistant varieties and native plants whenever possible. Planting a wide assortment of flowering plants will provide a pollen and nectar food source that will attract the adults and please you as well.

If you need to purchase additional beneficials, a catalog is available from the California Environmental Protection Agency. You may request one free hard copy from:

Department of Pesticide Regulation  
Environmental Monitoring and Pest Management Branch  
1020 N Street, Room 161  
Sacramento, California 95814-5604  
Telephone: (916) 324-4100  
PM 94-03

Or read it online at <http://www.cdpr.ca.gov/docs/dprdocs/goodbug/benefic.htm>.

