

# 9 Ways to Welcome Beneficial Insects to Your Garden -- and Deter Pests!

*By Jessica Veter, Volunteer, Royal Botanical Garden. Ed. Jo-Ann Canning, Master Gardener  
Edited and updated for local information by Jo-Ann Canning, Master Gardener*

Birds aren't the only friends who help control insect pests in the garden. Other beneficials like dragonflies, beetles, ladybugs, lacewings, tachinid flies, parasitic wasps are brilliant predators in their own right.



(pictured: young robin bathing, Wild Birds Unlimited)

They also pollinate the veggie patch and are great recyclers. So, how can we make sure our beneficial birds and insects hang around?

## 1. No Pesticides

Stopping pesticide use is your first step because chemicals are equal-opportunity killers that can't distinguish between friends and foes.

(Pictured-->: hummingbird at honeysuckle, Dallas Morning News)



## 2. Plant Pollinator-Friendly



Plant a variety of flowering plants rich in nectar, including plants like yarrow, coneflowers, coreopsis, daisies, asters, goldenrod, cosmos. Native plants are important, but the extended bloom times of exotics shouldn't be overlooked. (Pictured: pale purple coneflower, RBG)

## 3. Let Some Vegetables & Herbs Go to Flower & Seed

Consider borage, coriander, fennel, dill, lavender, thyme, parsley, lemon balm, oregano, brassicas, onions.

(Pictured: bumblebee on walking onion, © J. Canning)



## 4. Plant for Blooms All Season Long

Pay attention to bloom times! Make sure there are nectar sources in flower from early spring (species crocus), mid-season (poppies and sunflowers) to late fall (sedum, native aster). Annuals can fill in gaps. Choose single flowers rather than doubles as many double blossoms, though beautiful, are of little or no use for pollinators.

(Pictured: milkweed & monarch butterfly caterpillar, RBG)



## 5. Add Companion Plants

Intersperse plants which attract beneficial insects with plants requiring protection and you'll be pest-free and pollinator rich. Many herbs provide this service and provide both blossoms and flavours to your garden.



(Pictured: bald faced hornet on goldenrod, RBG)

## 6. Think Big

Trees and shrubs also flower, and are important for beneficials. Willows, Acers, Malus, Cornus, Ribes, Viburnum, are all excellent choices. Think of your garden in terms of height as well as width. The possibilities are exciting

(Pictured: butterfly on flowering cherry)



## 7. Be Sure to Add Water

Provide a water source for insects and birds. A pond, bird bath or even a shallow dish does the trick. Put a few stones in the water as landing pads for insects, and change the water to keep it fresh. (Pictured: bee bath, The Worm that Turned.com)



## 8. Minimise Soil Disturbance & Include Ground-Cover

Many pollinators depend on mulch which also conserves soil moisture and provides shelter, so leaving some of the autumn leaves or mixing them into mulch is a good over-wintering strategy. Almost 75% of beneficial insects nest or overwinter in the soil, so be sure to leave a few inches of bare earth around the base of shrubs. Plant non-invasive ground covers like creeping phlox, creeping thyme, sedum, or sweet woodruff.

(Pictured: Phlox)



## 9. Leave Some "Weeds"

Weeds are just plants growing in the wrong spot. Plants such as dandelion, wood sorrel, and clover are not invasive, and are excellent nectar sources for many pollinators. (Pictured: Dandelion, Gardening Knowhow.com)