

How to Attract Dragonflies to Your Backyard

By Jo-Ann Canning, Master Gardener

There are over 25 species of dragonflies who call Vancouver Island home and you can easily attract these voracious mosquito predators to live in your yard. In return for a good home they will keep your yard mosquito-free all summer while they entertain you with their antics, colours and grace. Here are a few rules for making a dragonfly haven. image: blue dasher, Salt Spring Island Conservancy



Add a Water Feature to Your Garden

Dragonflies thrive near water, and need it to breed and lay eggs.

A good pond spot is sheltered from the wind and gets plenty of afternoon sun. No matter how big or small your water source is, be sure it has shallow edges and a center that is at least 60 cm (2 ft) deep.



image: Harebell & Bee.co.uk

Pre-molded pond shapes are found at many garden centres and home improvement stores and online. You don't need a large pond to attract dragonflies. A large ceramic pot, or child's wading pool works equally well, and is often a good choice for small yards or a deck. Always add some stones to the bottom of your container with extra stones higher up towards the edge to give dragonflies a spot to perch. Add a pond plant or two, fill it with water and enjoy the serenity water features bring to your space. A bubbler or small fountain makes it even more attractive.

These plants oxygenate your plants and keep the water from

Don't Use Pesticides

Pesticides are equal opportunity killers. While they kill pests, they also kill off hummingbirds and beneficial insects, including dragonflies. And when you invite these wonderful garden guardians into your garden, you'll soon have very few pests. You really don't need chemicals to manage your garden.

Add Dragonfly-friendly Plants

Aquatic vegetation gives dragonflies a place to lay their eggs, provides the aquatic nymph, called a "niad," a places to hunt for food and hide from predators. When the niad is ready for its last molt, it needs an aquatic plant stalk to climb, where it will take its first flight as an adult. Pond-side plants, called marginals and bog plants (those who also need wet environment and mud on their feet) also offer perching places, protection from predators, flowers for you and shade for the pond. Here are some varieties that are perfect for planting in and around your pond. Several are natives which are always preferred by all beneficial insects. All the plants on this list are safe in our area, in other words, they will not destroy the environment or harm any wildlife.

Aquatic Plants

- Arrowhead (*Sagittaria latifolia*)
- Bladderwort (*Utricularia*)
- Yellow water-lily (*Nuphar lutea*)



image: *Nuphar lutea*, nativeplantgrower.com

Aquatic Plants, continued

- Great yellow pond-lily (*Nuphar polysepala*)
- Water crowfoot (*Ranunculus aquatilis*)
- broad leafed cattail (*Typha latifolia*)
- willow moss (*Fontinalis antipyretica*)

Marginals and Bog Plants

- small flowered bulrush (*Scirpus albens*)
- hollow Joe Pye weed (*Eupatorium fistulosum*) black eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*)
- sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*)
- pitcher plant (*Sarracenia purpurea*)
- marsh marigold (*Caltha palustris*)
- Labrador tea (*Rhododendron goenlandicum*)
- Narrow leaf cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*).



image: dreamtimes.com

Give Them a Place to Perch

Add rocks around at least part of the water feature, and one or two that stick up well above the water surface. Dragonflies like to sun themselves, and the warmth of flat topped rocks attracts them. A few small logs will add interest and variety. A nearby leafy plant with long stalks planted gives them a quick refuge from predators.

Caveat for pond plants: **DO NOT PLANT THESE!**

Many water and bog plants are invasive in our area though some are still sold at local garden centres. Beware of the following lovely but environment-killing aquatics and marginals:

- Fragrant Waterlily (*Nymphaea odorata*). A popular plant in many garden centres (see below).
- European Waterlily (*Nymphaea alba*). A related variety to the fragrant lily (above) that also chokes out native species, clogs waterways and is hazardous to boating.
- Water chestnut (*Trapa natans*): has sharp, nut-like fruits that can injure people and animals.
- Yellow flag iris (*Iris pseudacorus*) Very difficult to control. Invades ditches, wetlands, streams, lake shorelines, and shallow ponds. A serious threat to streams, lakes, & urban drainage in BC.
- Brazilian elodea (*Egeria densa*): can form dense mats that hinder water flow and recreation.
- Fanwort (*Cabomba caroliniana*): aquatic that can spread rapidly and displace native species.
- Water lettuce (*Pistia stratiotes*): forms floating mats that block light and reduce oxygen levels.
- Eurasian watermilfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*): forms dense underwater stands & surface mats, displacing native vegetation.
- Yellow floating heart (*Nymphoides peltata*): forms dense mats. Blocks sunlight & reduces oxygen levels harming other aquatic life.
- Parrotfeather (*Myriophyllum aquaticum*): popular aquarium plant that can easily escape into the wild. Clogs waterways, and provides breeding grounds for mosquitoes.
- Flowering rush (*Butomus umbellatus*): forms dense stands that alter water flow and displaces native vegetation. Considered a serious threat to aquatic ecosystems in British Columbia.

Resources

With thanks to the following print and internet sources who provided scientific data for this article.

- Canadian Wildlife Federation Blog, June 7, 2023
- Miracle-Gro Canada, <https://miraclegro.com/en-ca/landscaping-planning/>
- Ducks Unlimited, Canada
- Invasive Species Council of BC
- "The Rock & Water Garden Expert" Dr. D.G. Hessayon. 1193 Transworld Publisher, London, UK