

Good bug, Bad bug.

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Q: I would like to introduce some ladybugs to my garden to control the aphids on my cabbage but I have read that they don't always stick around. Am I wasting my money to buy lady bugs?

A: In general, there are ten commonly known beneficial garden insects. What makes them useful? They help decompose plant material, pollinate crops and devour a wide range of pests that are harmful to the garden. Controlling aphids using beneficial insects can work very well but the ladybug may not be the best choice of beneficial insect. Ladybugs are the best known of the "good bugs" but they are not always the most useful for pest control in the garden as they tend to be fickle and fly away.

I like to use green lacewing larvae for aphid control as they are voracious eaters and they are less likely to fly away. The green lacewing larvae have an alligator like appearance and a huge appetite for mealy bugs, whiteflies and aphids

There are several other "good bugs" to choose from in addition to the green lacewing and ladybug. One such good guy is the pirate bug. These bugs will eat thrips and spider mites. The Praying mantis is another beneficial insect that is well liked by gardeners because they will eat many different types' bugs such as crickets, beetles, aphids or leafhoppers. Other insects useful for pest control in the garden include the parasitic wasp, centipede, assassin bug, and hover fly. In spite of what the name might indicate, these are all beneficial for the garden. The parasitic wasp lays eggs in the bodies of pests such as the tomato hornworm or cabbage worm, feeding off of them and eventually killing them. Centipedes will wipe out soil dwelling pests such as slugs. Millipedes help break down organic material. Assassin bugs feed on flies, harmful beetles and mosquitoes. The larvae of the hover fly will devour up to 400 aphids as a larvae.

Many beneficial insects are attracted to the garden by flowering weeds and herbs such as dandelions, daisies, yarrow, dill and other plants with small flowers. Good bugs need to have a food source even when the "bad bugs" are not present in the garden so that they will stick around. You can provide food and habitat for the "good bugs" by planting an insectary in or near your garden. An insectary is a

garden just for insects that is planted as a boarder or in a corner of your garden. Getting flowering plants growing early will be an asset in controlling the pests like aphids which appear with early growth. Plants of varying heights and scents will attract different bugs and different beneficial insects. Favorite plants to grow that attract beneficial insects include mint, daisies, yarrow, cosmos, alfalfa and clover. Make sure to include plants with multiple heights and bloom times in your insectary, Low-growing herbs such as thyme and oregano give ground beetles a place to hide. The taller plants will attract Beneficial's like the hover flies and parasitic wasps who look for nectar. Along with having a nice variety of flowering plants these bugs appreciate having a bug bath present. This consists of a shallow container with stones or gravel and just enough water to keep it moist. The stones ought to be large enough for insects to rest on, but not drown when drinking.

One final important thing to keep these good bugs in your garden - avoid the use of harmful pesticides. Using pesticide kills all bugs in the garden not just the "bad bugs".

To read more about beneficial insects go to the UC IPM website
<http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn74140.html>