

# Pest or Guest? Friend or Foe?

*Beneficial wildlife for the garden*



**Worcestershire  
Wildlife Trust**

Each garden is a miniature ecosystem. The creatures within it determine what thrives, survives, deteriorates or dies.

Any rash action taken by the gardener may affect that all important equilibrium between the garden's pests and guests.

The wildlife gardener needs to adopt a 'live and let live' philosophy, which means allowing a balance of good and bad insects to exist for their mutual benefit.

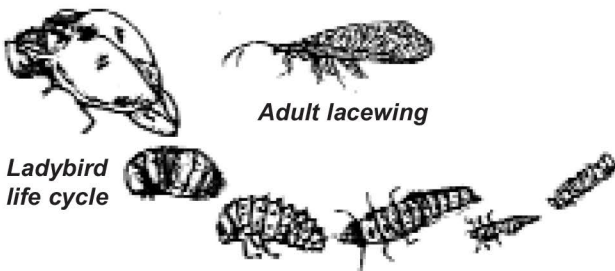
Spraying with chemicals ultimately does more damage than good. It creates an imbalance where beneficial predatory insects

starve because their food source is diminished.

It is best to grow as wide a range of plants as possible to attract both beneficial predators and the undesirable pests on which they live.

## Double trouble

Ladybirds are invaluable in the garden - both adult and larvae feed on destructive pests such as aphids, thrips, mealy bugs and mites. An adult ladybird can consume 5000 aphids during its life; some ladybirds even feed on powdery mildew fungal spores. Another 'must-have' insect is the lacewing, which also offers the wildlife gardener two for the price of one as, once again, both the adult and ferocious-looking larvae eat aphids, mites, leafhoppers and scale insects.



Plant bright flowers, particularly yellows and purples as these attract many beneficial insects.

## Pest deterrent plants

Many garden pests are attracted by scent. Planting strong smelling herbs may repel them. If they don't deter them, they may encourage biological control in the form of predators such as the hoverfly whose larvae eat up to 50 aphids a day!

Tansy	Marigolds
Mints	Wormwood
Catnip	Onion/garlic family

## Have a smashing time in the garden

The song thrush consumes vast quantities of garden snails. So give them a helping hand by placing a flat stone in the flower border, which they can use as an anvil to smash the shell.

For more information on dealing with slugs and snails in the garden see factsheet ***Snail and Slug control***.



## Marigolds

As well as the flowers attracting adult hoverflies, marigold roots emit a substance that repels the potato root eelworm and some other types of nematode worms. Take care, however, as white butterflies are also partial to the marigolds...so make sure you plant them away from the cabbage patch.

## Fast friends

A rough and ready rule for deciding if a non-flying creature is a friend or foe is 'does it move quickly?' If so, it is likely



to be a predator and, therefore, a gardener's friend, whereas if it is slow moving, it is probably a plant eater and could be a nuisance in the garden.

## Why so many?

Man has helped to create the problem of garden pests. In the wider countryside these animals are not a problem; they're not presented with row upon row of delicious plants. Out in the countryside, the plants are dispersed and the insects will have to search around for long periods looking for another food plant. Some starve before they find another suitable plant and some will be discovered and eaten by predators. In the garden the adult will lay its eggs on a suitable plant for the young to eat. When they have consumed that initial plant they will move along the row to the next one. Because they don't have to travel far there is less chance of individuals being discovered and eaten - therefore they start to thrive.

### 'Fairy's Pigs'

Bibble-bugs, tiggy-hogs and fairy's pigs are all names for woodlice.

These creatures are important in the breakdown of plant material. By eating decaying matter they help to retain nutrients in the soil.



Bats can eat up to 3500 insects a night. See our **Bat Boxes** factsheet for making your own bat homes.



By autumn many of the gardener's allies are looking for places to spend the winter. Being overtired in the garden tends to remove many of the hibernation sites of these pest predators so try to leave as much of the garden as undisturbed as possible.

### Decoys

Most wildlife gardeners already know of the benefits of leaving a patch of nettles in a sunny spot for butterfly larvae to feed on. However now there is another reason, as it seems that they are a favoured food of snails. They congregate around the nettles, thus acting as decoy away from those prized vegetables and plants.

### Wasps

The social wasp, which is not everyone's favourite at picnics, is of great use around the garden. The grubs of the wasp are fed almost entirely on caterpillars and other insects. By the end of the summer a nest may have consumed up to 250,000 insects. Solitary wasps also feed their young on flies, aphids and caterpillars so, therefore, should also be encouraged into the wildlife garden. To make a stick case for solitary wasps see our **Creature Feature** factsheet.

### Hoverflies

Adult hoverflies, with their black and yellow stripes, mimic the wasp but are completely harmless and should be encouraged into the garden. Their maggot-like larva munches aphids by the dozen before emerging as an adult. Plants to attract hoverflies include:



Michaelmas daisy  
Phacelia  
Sedum  
Teasel  
Angelica  
Scabious



### Log pile

A pile of logs in a shady corner makes a good home for many of the garden's welcome guests. Frogs, toads, shrews, hedgehogs, ground beetles, centipedes, slow-worms and rove beetles will all use a log pile for a home.

Site the log pile in an area that is shady for most of the day with cover nearby. Try to use a mixture of different types of woods, 15-25 cm in diameter and preferably with the bark still on. Avoid treated wood. You could even site a hedgehog box under it. If you wish to make a hedgehog home see our factsheet on **Furry Furniture**.

