

Bell County Master Gardener

Tip of the Week

By Mary Lew Quesinberry

“Welcoming Insects to the Garden”

When you mention insects, many people’s first reaction is to get out the bug spray. But wait...most insects are beneficial and a healthy garden will have many of them.

What do insects do?

Insects provide food for wildlife such as the Mockingbird, Hummingbird and Purple Martin. Other insect eaters are Woodpeckers, Cardinals, Wrens, frogs, toads and lizards.

Insects are vital in plant pollination, especially in the food industry.

Bees produce honey, which is used as a food and in health and beauty products.

Insects provide grace and beauty- remember that caterpillars turn into butterflies and moths.

The best insect control is beneficial insects. Wasps eat spiders, Ladybugs eat Aphids, spiders eat flies, and the Mud Dauber’s favorite food is the Black Widow Spider. A strong bird population is another way to control insects. Birds will gobble up undesirable grasshoppers, crickets and armyworms. Attract these garden warriors by providing fresh water and layers of plant material that they can use for shelter. Select plants that produce berries such as Yaupon Holly, Possumhaw Holly, American Beauty Berry, Mahonia, Pigeon Berry, Chili Piquin, and Turk’s Cap. Supplement the birds’ diet by providing seed such as Black Oil Sunflower Seed, Safflower Seed, and Niger.

To encourage butterflies to your garden, include nectar plants such as Scabiosa, Coreopsis, Rudebeckia, Greg’s Blue Mist, Purple Coneflower, Lavender, Verbena, Dill and Milkweed. Other plants that encourage beneficial insects are Alyssum, Goldenrod, Lantana, Yarrow, Sunflower and Roses.

Encourage beneficial insects and birds to your garden by keeping it pesticide free and selecting plant material that will appeal to wildlife. A healthy garden will have beauty, movement and sound and will be safe for people, the planet, pets and wildlife. Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas? Contact ask.bcmga@gmail.com

