

BENEFICIAL INSECTS



Organic gardeners do not use synthetic pesticides on their plants, so it is to their advantage to understand beneficial insects, including how to attract and use them. At the first sign of a pest infestation in the garden, gardeners must take steps to control pest populations to reduce the amount damage plants sustain. Pest populations are at their peak in spring and summer; however, pest problems can linger on into the fall and winter in mild climates. So, gardeners must be vigilant with any pest control method.

What Are Beneficial Insects

Beneficial insects are those that feed on the pests that damage the garden. Some common beneficial insects include lacewings, ladybugs, spiders, ground beetles, praying mantises and predatory wasps. These insects eat a variety of small, but harmful insects, such as aphids, mites, scale and their eggs. Predatory and parasitic wasps are the most beneficial because they kill insect eggs and help control caterpillar populations.

When to Use Beneficial Insects

Gardeners should release beneficial insects at the first signs of pest damage, such as chewed leaves, flowers or stems and discolored foliage, and repeat a few weeks later. Once beneficial insects are released, gardeners must create an inviting habitat for them. This includes adding mulch around plants and providing adequate moisture. Gardeners can also entice beneficial insects to remain in the garden by offering them a free meal of one part sugar to four parts water sprayed on the lower leaves of plants. This should be repeated as natural food supplies decrease.

Attracting and Releasing Beneficial Insects

Gardeners can attract beneficial insects to an area by planting a variety of plants, such as sunflowers, marigolds, daisies and yarrow among others. According to the USDA National Agroforestry Center, it is best to include plants native to the area to attract native beneficial insects. Once a gardener sees a pest damaging the garden, it must be identified to choose the beneficial insect for a particular pest. While it may take some time to research and find the best predatory insects, it is a safe and easy way for those with small organic gardens to rid the area of pests.

Gardeners can purchase beneficial insects from mail order suppliers. Before releasing them, gardeners should water the garden and add a layer of mulch around the base of plants. Gardeners can release the bugs at sundown by gently placing them on leaves or flowers of affected plants.