



How Does Your Garden Grow?

Now that summer is upon us, it is time to take note of the various insect visitors we have coming to our gardens. Some of these are welcomed by us, others not.

One of those that think we planted our garden just for its pleasure is the European earwig. Earwigs were imported (I hope accidentally) in the early 1900's and, not having any natural enemies, have exploded in population numbers. They especially like to feed on our delicate flowers such as dahlias and daffodils.

One positive thing we can say about them is that they have a great maternal instinct. The female lays her eggs in a secluded cluster and then wraps her body around them until they hatch. She even "licks" the eggs frequently to keep molds from attacking the surface of her progeny. With all that motherly care the hatchlings are off to a good start.

Of course, in contrast to the earwig is our friend the ladybird beetle. Ladybirds help us both as larvae and as adults by eating aphids and other small garden pests. The warning colors of orange and black on the ladybird (both in the larva and adult) warn would-be predators to steer clear of these insects. If you pick up a ladybird beetle and it feels threatened, it will give off an orange liquid that has a disagreeable odor and also probably tastes bad. Lady "bugs" can therefore go on about their business and not have to worry about being eaten themselves.

We love to see butterflies in our gardens in summer. Many of the plants we grow also serve as food for their larvae. For example, the anise swallowtail lays its eggs on members of the carrot family. If you grow parsley, carrots, dill, fennel or other family members, you might observe the green and yellow striped larva of this butterfly. In the early stages, the larva looks exactly like a bird dropping (black with an irregular white blotch in its middle). Some camouflage, huh?

Hiding during the day, but active at night are the carabid beetles. These beetles are black, long legged and active. The various species are all predatory and are great beneficials to the garden. One species, the snail eater, actively feeds on snails and slugs. To promote this species, you should keep a good supply of slugs in your garden. JUST KIDDING!

If you have an outside light, you probably see lacewings being attracted to it at night. Lacewing adults and larvae are great garden predators. The larva especially is ravenous on aphids and small caterpillars. It has hollow mandibles that act like straws to suck the blood out of its victims. Quite a little monster (Dracula?)!

Observing the insects in our gardens puts a whole new perspective on gardening. Do your gardening with a watchful eye to the wonderful world of our insect friends and foes!

