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INSECTS IN THE GARDEN: LESSON 6

STICK AROUND, PLEASE!

KEEPING GOOD INSECTS IN YOUR GARDEN

Lessons 3, 4, and 5 profiled several types of beneficial insects and described how they feed and survive. To keep beneficial insects in your garden, you have to provide the right habitat and food sources. “The right habitat” doesn’t mean that your yard has to look like a tidy garden paradise (Photo 6-1). Keep reading to find out how you can attract and keep beneficial insects in your garden.

SUPPORTING INSECTS IN THE GARDEN

Soil-dwelling and foliar predators need to eat. This means that you will have to tolerate some level of the plant-feeding pests that these predators consume. However, keeping a garden rich in flowers will also provide nutrition for beneficial insects.

Before making any significant plans for your garden, you must know its soil type, drainage, and sunlight so you can select plants that are adapted to your location. If your garden gets at least 6 hours of sunlight a day, it should be able to grow suitable plants. If your garden soil drains poorly, choose plants that will tolerate wet soils. MSU Extension’s [Plant Search Tool](#) can help you identify flowering plants that match your soil, drainage, and sunlight conditions. Hundreds of



Photo 6-1. The vegetables in raised beds and the beds of perennials in front of this home offer a bit of habitat that will help attract insects to the yard. (Photo by David Lowenstein)

plants, some that bloom in summer and others that bloom in spring, produce the nectar that will attract insect visitors.

Neatly planted rows look nice but can expose predators to other insects and birds that might eat

them. Insect predators prefer some messiness, plants of variable heights they can hide in, and spaces that allow them to move between direct sunlight and shade. Growing a combination of perennial flowers and ornamental grasses

is a good defense against insect pests. Keeping plants healthy also requires you to follow good cultural practices such as not overwatering, spacing your plants the right distance apart, and thinning and pruning your plants occasionally.

The size of your garden will also affect how successful you are at attracting beneficial insects and keeping them around. Growing even a few flowers and shrubs on a porch or apartment balcony is a good start (Photo 6-2). Insects will travel for blocks, or even for miles, in search of food sources or habitat.

To see meaningful increases in the number of beneficial insects, you may need to make landscape-level changes and gain broad community support. Otherwise, your garden will be an island surrounded by habitat that won't support insects.



Photo 6-2. Even a small grouping of potted plants on a porch, deck, or balcony will attract insects. (Photo by David Lowenstein)

WHAT'S NEXT

Thank you for participating in the Insects in the Garden series. We hope you found this MSU Extension basic entomology email course interesting and informative. If you registered for the Insects in the Garden series and received the lessons via email, in a few days you will receive another email with a link in it to a course evaluation survey. Your responses will be confidential, and we'll use your feedback to help us improve the series.

If you have questions about the survey or would like more information on any of the topics covered in this course, please email the series author, David Lowenstein, at lowenst6@msu.edu.

FIND OUT MORE: REFERENCES & RESOURCES

Michigan State University Extension. (n.d.). *Plant search tool*. https://www.canr.msu.edu/nativeplants/plant_facts/plant-search-tool

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