

Insects in Your Garden

By Sandra Gray, Fort Bend Master Gardener

Gardeners are naturally interested in insects. We need to know which ones we should encourage in our gardens and which ones we should discourage. Butterflies, ants, flies, beetles, aphids, bees and wasps are all examples of insects that live around us.

Most insects are beneficial and we consider them to be “good guys”. In fact, only 1 to 3 percent of all insects are considered pests. Beneficial insects help us by controlling insect populations, by pollinating plants, and by helping to decompose nature’s trash. Spiders are not “insects”, but most spiders are desirable.

The best defense against pest insects is a healthy garden. Choose plants that are pest-resistant and well-adapted to our area; include host plants to attract beneficial insects. Feed your soil with organic compost containing the microbes and nutrients to help grow strong, robust plants.

Observe and identify the insects in your garden, and learn which ones are beneficial, working for you as predators, pollinators, parasites or decomposers. Monitor pest populations, and don’t worry about small numbers of pests. After all, insect pests are dinner for the predators, and a few holes in leaves won’t hurt your plants.



White Striped Long-tailed Butterfly



Eastern Pond Hawk Dragonfly

If damage increases to unacceptable levels, accurately identify the pest causing the damage. The treatment needs to be specific to that pest causing the damage. Use the least aggressive method of control first. Use a chemical pesticide only as a last resort. If you must use a chemical, read and re-read labels before purchasing a product and again before applying it.

If you have questions, call the Fort Bend County Master Gardener Hot Line (281-342-3034) or submit questions through <https://fbmg.org/ask-a-master-gardener/>. The Fort Bend Master Gardeners Entomology group is available through the hot line to help identify insects and tell you ways to encourage the good ones.



Lightening Beetle