



Henderson County Master Gardeners

Weekly News Article

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Beneficial Bugs in Your Garden

by Lydia Holley

Gardeners rejoice when they see ladybugs in their garden. That is because ladybugs are beneficial predators, having a voracious appetite for aphids. It is estimated that one single ladybug can eat 5,000 aphids in its lifetime. Ladybugs will also eat other pests such as white flies and mites. There are several different species of ladybugs, with different shell colors and different spot patterns.



The bright color of the adult ladybug makes it easy for humans to spot, but is a warning to birds and other predators. Birds soon realize ladybugs do not make for a tasty meal as ladybugs can ooze a foul smelling and bitter tasting liquid from their joints. Ladybug nymphs look very different from the adult - long, black, with orange markings on both sides. Nymphs also consume aphids ravenously.

Praying mantis are indiscriminate predators, killing both harmful and beneficial prey. Still, most entomologists place praying mantis in the beneficial category. There are three predominate species of praying mantis in the United States, with only one being native. There is a popular and frightening photo on the internet of a praying mantis killing a hummingbird. This large mantis is probably of a species found in the tropics.

The hoverfly, or syrphid fly, is doubly important because they are a pollinator as an adult and a beneficial predator in the larvae stage. Most people never notice this unusual insect. Hoverfly larvae, a powerful predator of aphids, is not easily seen, being very small, green, and legless.

Adult hoverflies are not easily recognized. There are numerous species of hoverflies, giving you “a wide number of different looks and sizes”, according to Master Gardener Wayne Stafford. Stafford has taken an interest in hoverflies, and has numerous photos of hoverflies, each with a unique look. Most, however, look like a bee or wasp, although hoverflies do not sting. Additionally, bees and wasps have four wings, while hoverflies have two.

Stafford gives another tip to easily identify the hoverfly. “They have two paddle-like antenna, not a long antenna as seen on most bees or wasps”, he says. Being a beneficial predator and a pollinator, hoverflies should be on any gardener’s wish list. Do not despair, however, if you have never detected hoverflies in your garden. They are probably there. Stafford says, “When you have a diverse collection of flowering plants, you will have hoverflies”. So next time you think you see a bee or a wasp, take a close look. It just may be a hoverfly instead.

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