

July 8, 2015



Welcome the Beneficials  
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I am in search of the rove beetle; have you seen one, or better yet -- a dozen? Rumor has it that they devour snails and I do need that! They inhabit piles of decaying organic material. So, next I need to establish an insectary area near the vegetable garden where the snails are hard at work. I want the snails gone!

The rove beetle is a beneficial - a “good” bug, and there are a few of them.

Good bugs, bad bugs. Good Insects, bad insects. Which should be more of a concern? The “bad” bugs can actually be quite beneficial. Who are they? And how do they help?

In general, there are ten to twelve commonly known beneficial garden insects. What makes them useful? They help decompose plant material, pollinate crops and devour pests that are harmful to the garden.

Ladybugs may be the best known good bugs. They are especially known for their ability to eat aphids on roses, but they are also attracted by flowering weeds and herbs such as dandelions, yarrow or dill.

Another good guy is the pirate bug. They will eat thrips and spider mites. Plants that attract them include goldenrod, daisies and yarrow. The Praying mantis is well liked because they eat many bugs such as crickets, beetles, aphids or leafhoppers. The green lacewing larvae have an alligator appearance and a huge appetite for mealy bugs, whiteflies and aphids. Flowering plants will be sure to attract them.

Have you heard of the parasitic wasp, centipede, assassin bug, or hover fly? In spite of what the name might indicate, these are all beneficial for the garden. The parasitic wasp lays eggs in the

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bodies of pests such as the tomato hornworm or cabbage worm, feeding off of them and eventually killing them. Centipedes will wipe out soil dwelling pests such as slugs. Millipedes help break down organic material. Assassin bugs feed on flies, harmful beetles and mosquitoes. The larvae of the hover fly will devour 400 aphids.

These good bugs do need to be attracted and so planting an insectary is helpful. An insectary is a garden just for insects, and getting plants growing early will be an asset in controlling the pests like aphids which appear with early growth. Plants of varying heights and scents will attract different bugs and different beneficial insects.

Favorite plants to grow include mint, daisies, cosmos, marigold and clover. Low-growing herbs such as thyme and oregano give ground beetles a place to hide. The taller plants will attract beneficials like hover flies and parasitic wasps who look for nectar. Along with having a nice variety of flowering plants these bugs appreciate having a bug bath present. This consists of a shallow container with stones or gravel and just enough water to keep it moist. The stones ought to be large enough for insects to rest on, but not drown when drinking.

One final important way to attract these good bugs - avoid the use of harmful pesticides.

Today from 9:00 a.m. to noon at the Cameron Park Community Center, 2502 Country Club Drive in Cameron Park: three Gardening with Kids classes will be offered on Raising Compost Worms. Designed for children from 5-7 (with adult assisting) or ages 8 up. This class will teach kids about beneficial worms, help them make their own worm bin, and give them worms to get started at home! Go to <http://ucanr.edu/edc-raisingworms> to pre-register, or call our office for more information.

There is no Master Gardener free public education class this Saturday.

UCCE Master Gardeners are available to answer your questions at local farmers markets and in their office every Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome at the office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at <http://ucanr.edu/edmg>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter. You can also find us on Facebook.