

Gardening Reminders

By the Royal Oaks Landscape Committee

What's Bugging You?

STOP! Before you step on that spider or other creepy-crawly in your lawn or garden, consider whether or not it is there to help or do harm.

In the book *Good Garden Bugs: Everything You Need to Know About Beneficial Predatory Insects*, author and entomology professor Mary M. Gardiner, Ph.D., breaks down how to distinguish the “good” bugs from the pests and how to create a garden that will welcome these helpful critters.

You can use pest-fighting methods that deploy nature’s own biological controls. Aim for a diverse garden with native plants and “natural enemy” arthropods – the ones that eat the pests that you might deter through pesticides.

By nurturing these insects and spiders, you can avoid using harmful chemical pesticides. But you must learn what helpful species look like. For example, did you know that there are two dozen kinds of ladybugs? You also need to know what native plants will attract your allies in the “bad bug” war. Bees love flowering trees, shrubs, annuals and perennials so blooms are available throughout the year. Birds such as hummingbirds are attracted to flowering plants like firecracker bush, bottlebrush, esperanza and sages, to name a few. Butterflies look for nectar-bearing plants such as alyssum, rudbeckia or pentas. They also need “host” plants like lantana and ruellia where they can lay their eggs.

“It’s easy to lose sight of how helpful some insects can be,” writes Gardiner. “With the right balance of plant-feeding herbivores and natural enemies, you can create a sustainable garden at home.”

Sources: Good Garden Bugs: Everything You Need to Know About Beneficial Predatory Insects, by Mary M. Gardiner, Quarry Books, May 2015, appearing in Nature Conservancy, February/March 2016; A Habitat for Wildlife, by Jill Carroll, Houston Chronicle, February 6, 2016.