

Q&A

Questions and answers from the UC IPM Urban and Community Webinar “Natural Enemies & Beneficial Bugs: What are they?”

Q: Do lady bugs bite?

A: It is rare, but lady beetles can bite people. Their bite isn't strong enough to break the skin.

Q: After ladybeetles finish eating aphids, how do you get rid of them? Or do they just fly away by themselves?

A: The lady beetles will fly away in search of other food, mates, or overwintering sites. There is no need to get rid of the lady beetles.

Q: Do predatory insects kill other predators or good bugs?

A: Yes, some of the general predators kill other predators and natural enemies. For example, praying mantids may eat both pests and natural enemies. Others, like ladybugs won't harm other natural enemies.

Q: Are birds to be considered as natural enemies of bad bugs? Should we be trying to attract them also to our gardens?

A: Some birds can be helpful in pest control. View our webinar from May that discusses this topic in more detail:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B2fuKAilqx8&list=PLo3rG4iqv4gGC9sa9Tdl_WfCV4BNMHral&index=24

Q: Aren't all insecticides broad spectrum?

A: No, there are certain insecticides that only target a specific group or type of insect. See our Active Ingredient Database to learn how specific pesticides will affect natural enemies: <https://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/menu.pesticides.php>.

Q: Where can I purchase natural enemies?

A: Contact your local UC Master Gardener program to see if they know about a local resource. A local garden center may carry lady beetles, lacewing larvae, and praying mantid eggs but others may need to be ordered online.

Q: The larvae stage of the lacewing appears similar in appearance to an earwig. Is there a good way to define the difference?

A: Earwigs are much larger and darker in color than lacewing larvae. See <https://ipm.ucanr.edu/natural-enemies/green-lacewings/> for more information on lacewings or <https://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn74102.html> for more on earwigs.

Q: Should we remove Oleander aphids off milkweed plants? Some say leaving them gives predators an alternative to monarch eggs. Others say the Oleander aphids decimate the milkweed.

A: The speaker somewhat addressed this issue verbally during the webinar. Having biodiversity in the landscape is the best way to encourage natural enemies. You can't really control what predators visit your garden and what they eat when they get there. Nature happens and we can't control everything. Doing some aphid management on plants you wish to protect is a decision you have to make yourself.

Q: Is the bromeliad syrphid fly a pest or predator?

A: Syrphid fly adults are pollinators and the larvae are predators of aphids, mealybugs, and other soft-bodied insects. See <https://ipm.ucanr.edu/natural-enemies/syrphids/> for more information.

Q: Should you remove sticky traps when releasing beneficial insects.?

A: If you have sticky traps hanging or staked in the soil near plants, yes remove them to avoid catching the beneficial insects. If sticky traps are on the ground for say, cockroaches, then you probably don't need to remove them.

Q: With more emphasis on mulch use, have had an explosion of earwigs this year. How do we balance the increase in mulch and the "bad bugs" that also increase in the additional moist habitat? Also, how can we increase soldier beetles?

A: It's difficult to control the environmental conditions that favor some pests while using a tool that helps control other pests (mulch for weed control). Earwigs often have seasonal presence related to weather and their biology. Specifically for increasing soldier beetles, we don't have that information but you can read more about soldier beetles at <https://ipm.ucanr.edu/natural-enemies/soldier-beetles/>.

Q: Does attracting birds through feeders and birdbaths have a negative impact on the beneficial population (will they eat the beneficials)?

A: Birds can eat good bugs as well as bad bugs, but pest insects usually occur in higher numbers so birds are more likely to find and feed on those. See our previous webinar to learn more about how birds can help with pest control:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B2fuKAilqx8&list=PLo3rG4iqv4gGC9sa9Tdl_WfCV4BNMHral&index=24

Q: If there are lady beetles already on a plant that has aphids, should I step in to help?

A: Established plants can tolerate some pest pressure so a few pests doesn't usually warrant other control measures. Let the beneficial insects take care of them. If you step in with an insecticide, you will also kill the lady beetles and any other natural enemies.

Q: Are there any beneficial insects that can help with root aphids or other soil pests?

A: Soldier beetles, rove beetles, and other predaceous ground beetles will feed on soil pests like root aphids.

Q: What do you recommend for spider mites on a small rosemary plant?

A: If the plant is indoors, try to increase the humidity and eliminate dusty conditions as these promote spider mite populations. Outdoors, there are many natural enemies of spider mites, including predatory mites. See our Pest Notes for more information:

<https://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7405.html>

Q: Because of the wet spring, we have tall grass and grasshoppers! When might they disappear? Any suggestions on how to manage them?

A: Grasshoppers are one of the most difficult pests to control. Leaving a strip of tall grass around the garden or orchard may work to trap them and divert them from your crop.

See our Pest Notes for more information on how to control them:

<https://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn74103.html>

For specific questions about what plants to choose for pollinators and natural enemies, visit your local UC Master Gardeners: <https://mg.ucanr.edu/FindUs/>.

For questions about specific pests, see UC IPM's Pest Notes factsheets:

<https://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/index.html>.