

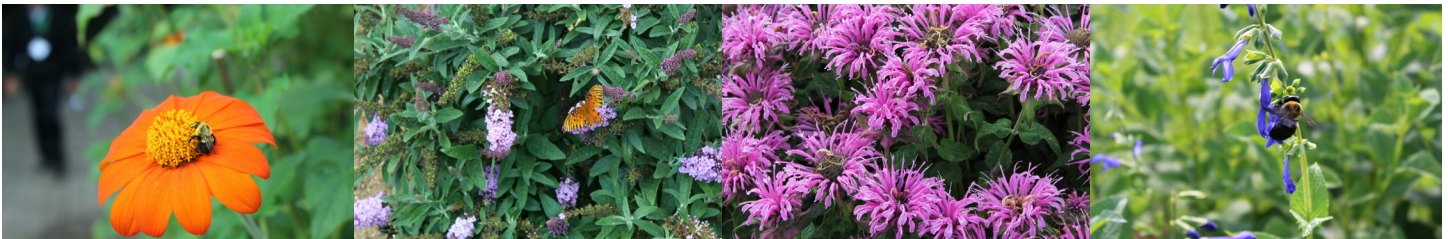
LANDSCAPE ORNAMENTAL SERIES

A Guide for Louisiana Landscape Professionals



Insect Insights for the Home Garden

Damon E. Abdi, Ph.D., Assistant Professor and Extension Specialist, Hammond Research Station
Jeb S. Fields, Ph.D., Assistant Professor and Extension Specialist, Hammond Research Station



From left: Mexican sunflower (*Tithonia*) with a bee buzzing around it. Butterfly Bush (*Buddleia*) drawing in its namesake. Bee balm (*Monarda*) offers profuse color to the landscape. *Salvia* (*Salvia*) offers a range of colors that keep the bees coming back. Photos by Damon Abdi

Insects in the garden can be both a benefit and a burden. Pollinating insects provide ecosystem services, helping to facilitate fruit set in plants by transferring pollen from flower to flower. Pest insects, on the other hand, can cause issues ranging from reducing aesthetic appeal to damaging plants beyond repair. Certain insects can also be of value in combating pest problems, serving as a natural predator for undesirable pests. Fostering a healthy garden, whether it contains ornamental plants or fruits and vegetables for the table, requires a management plan. This fact sheet provides some key considerations to developing and maintaining a healthy home garden.

Flowering Plants to Support Pollinators

Selecting landscape plants that are beloved by pollinators is an easy way to generate some buzz in your garden from insects and neighbors alike. Pollinators are attracted to flowers for their pollen, just as people are attracted to the profuse blooms that command attention. Plants such as butterfly bush (*Buddleia*) and bee balm (*Monarda*) are aptly named for the pollinators that they attract.

Determining an Action Threshold

Before taking action to combat a perceived pest problem, consider what you are willing to tolerate crawling around your garden. A completely insect-free garden is not only unrealistic, but likely unhealthy for your plants. Steps to address pest insects may also pose problems for pollinators and other desirable insects. Evaluate whether it makes more sense for you to pick a few pests off a plant, or to employ more intensive pesticide-based practices. In many cases, it is less expensive and easier to simply accept certain insects in the garden.

A Healthy Plant is a Happy Plant

Plants that are suffering from various stressors are more susceptible to pest damage. Ensuring that plants are properly hydrated, fertilized and cared for will help reduce the extent of the damage that pest insects may cause. Wilting plants with poor nutrition and pruning practices are more likely to suffer from a pest attack. Much like humans, plants that maintain a healthy body are less likely to suffer from sickness or other related issues. Making sure that plants are sufficiently watered, fertilized and maintained in the garden is one of the best ways to prevent pest issues.

Food or Flowers? Managing Edible Crops Versus Ornamental Crops

The threshold for tolerating pest issues largely depends on the purpose and place of a plant. Many people are hesitant to spray pesticides on crops in their home garden, with concerns over chemical residues in their food at the forefront. Using pesticides in home fruit and vegetable production can be done safely with certain chemicals. Before applying any product, make sure to fully read the label. Pesticides are rigorously researched for their use and application in edible crops, with pesticide labels providing information on what crops are safe to treat, as well as proper management recommendations so you know what is safe to eat. It is a good idea to look for pesticide formulations that are specifically designed for the home fruit and vegetable garden. Certain pesticides control pests upon contact, meaning when a pesticide is sprayed on a plant, the chemical must make contact with the pest in order to treat it. Pesticides may also be systemic, meaning once the pesticide is absorbed into the plant tissue, it moves around within the plant, even getting inside the parts of the plant you plan to eat; therefore, it is often recommended to avoid using systemic insecticides for controlling pests in food crops. Choosing pesticides for use in landscape

and ornamental plants offers more options to select from, as these plants are not for human consumption. Selecting pesticides that are safe to use for ornamentals can be done by fully reading and understanding the label, but be wary of what pets, people or plants nearby may be affected by pesticide drift and movement. Certain pesticides may be safe for your plants but poisonous to pollinators. Use recommended best management practices to ensure safety of all unintended targets.

Summary

Insects can be a benefit or a burden in the garden. Supporting pollinators adds an extra layer of life to the garden, helping to spur fruit set in food crops and create a more sustainable landscape to support the ecosystem. Selecting plants that support pollinators is a great way to ensure there is always something abuzz in the garden. For more ideas on plants for pollinators, check out the Louisiana Landscape Guides published on the AgCenter website, where the Hammond Research Station team lists plants of all kinds for all kinds of places. These lists will often indicate which plants are favorable to pollinators. For insects that are not welcome in your garden, consider using a range of integrated pest management (IPM) principles, and if pesticides are to be used, be sure to fully read the label.

For more information on pollinators and gardening, please contact your local LSU AgCenter extension office or visit our website at www.LSUAgCenter.com.



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