



## Keep Your Predators Snug as a Bug

In the fall most gardeners have torn out the annuals, pruned down the perennials and put away the gardening tools for the season. It's a good time to think about where your little gardening friends spent the summer and where they will over-winter. For those that are confused as to who I am referring to I will remind you of the ladybugs that helped clean up the aphids, the tiny wasp who stung the tent caterpillars and the ground beetles that feasted on the wicked slugs. The plants that you would normally prune out at the end of the season are potentially the winter homes of the voracious little predators we have working in the garden. Knowing how you can protect them through the winter season will have you prepared with an arsenal of natural pest control for next spring.

Most insects tend not to wander far from their place of birth. As a matter of fact it would not take much effort at all to rediscover our gardening buddies very close to the places we left them. The habit of insects is translated to simple terms, sleep where it is warmest and closest to the food. In our fast paced complicated lives this concept of living is far from our reality.

Take for example the ground beetle. This beetle spends its spring and summer days hiding out beneath ground covers avoiding the intensity of the sun on their dark backs. They emerge in the evening to roam, mate and feed. Coinciding with the behavior of their prey of slugs, caterpillars and soil grubs. Their methods are effective and efficient, incurring the least amount of unnecessary stress on the beetle. As the winter approaches their habits do not change, they just simply burrow deeper into the insulated soil. In human terms that would be like us living in the kitchen, feeding and sleeping at will. Quite often we disturb the nap of our hard-shelled little friends as we begin our garden preparations for spring. This is

a perfect opportunity to admire the beauty of this skilled predator, the cold temperatures having reduce its activity and allowing for a good long look. When finished your observing, always place the beetle back where you found it and cover with a little dirt.

Our gardens are virtually cities housing thousands of beneficial insects, their homes disguised as innocuous aging plants. The hollow of the foxglove is an excellent home for the highly predaceous Pirate bug, while the thick, cracking bark



of a fir tree allows for a ladybug condominium. Cracks and crevices found at the base of your shrubs is where many Lacewings will find their home and the stoic sunflower, a high-rise for the efficient caterpillar killer, the spined soldier bug. Even the simple flowering grasses host hundreds of parasitic wasps preparing for next spring. Embracing the idea of leaving dead rotting material in the garden can make many a gardener queasy, so lets talk garden cleanup.

### All gardens should be removed of material

- that currently harbour disease
- Prone to disease over winter

- Seriously infested with a pest (more than 30% at winter dieback)
- Areas where dieback will cause an abundance of sludge or moisture.

### Material that can be kept or added

- Plants with hollow stalks that are dry and free of disease.
- "Brown" mulch material that does not cause excess moisture.
- Statuary, rocks or driftwood for ground beetle habitat.

Encouraging the health of your natural predators does not just start & stop with spring and fall. Helping them with the right over-wintering habitat doubles the chance that they will return again next year to help out in the garden.

## What is going on in The Bug Lady's Garden?

In a dry season such as this I wake up every day and pray for rain. Not just for my collection of plants but for all the little insects that can't run to the store to get a bottle of Evian. My little oasis is dry, dry, dry. Both ponds are completely exposed and there is only a few feet of water in the well. The dragonflies that burrow in the muck of ponds or the beetles sheltering from the sun are all desperately seeking refreshment. Each day I divvy out small portions of water in an attempt to keep everyone happy. Most of them are in hiding except the few that thrive in these conditions. The aphids on my cauliflower or the earwigs feeding on them, there are few others about.

## Recommended Reading

*Garden Insects of North America*  
- Whitney Cranshaw

*Natural Insect, Weed & Disease Control*  
- Linda Gilkeson