

Published July 8th, 2020

Digging Deep with Goddess Gardener, Cynthia Brian

By Cynthia Brian



Integrated pest management creates a gorgeous garden oasis. Photos Cynthia Brian

Everyone loves lady beetles, known as ladybugs, and people understand the value of bees, but did you know that frogs, hoverflies, ground beetles, praying mantids and lacewings are invaluable friends to the garden?

The guardians of my garden galaxy are plentiful and ubiquitous. Every day as I walk through my oasis, I am greeted by numerous lizards darting from rock to plant, frogs hopping to hide under a leaf, spiders weaving webs, bumblebees, hoverflies and honeybees sucking the nectar from a variety of species, and birds making nests and dining on insects. My favorite garden guardians are the kingsnakes that eat gophers, moles, voles, and keep the rattlesnakes away.

Our garden colleagues keep nature in balance without the use of pesticides, herbicides and insecticides. Using integrated pest management, natural sources of nutrients including compost and mulch will fertilize and keep your garden healthy.

Here are some of the benefits of inviting our flying, hopping, slithering, and scooting comrades into your garden.

Birds:

As they fly from tree to tree, birds are pollinators adding more blooms and fruit which attract more birds. Birds eat a variety of pests including mosquitoes, aphids, grubs, slugs and spiders. Large birds such as owls and hawks eat rodents including voles, moles, squirrels, rats, and other unwelcome critters. They help control weeds by eating weed seeds. Watching birds and listening to their song reduces stress.

Invite birds to your landscape by offering:

A water source including a gurgling fountain or birdbath.

Birdhouses for shelter and nesting.

Feeders for seed. Even putting a pie tin in the bushes with seeds or picked clover and dandelions will attract our feathered friends,

Plant a selection of flowering plants, shrubs, and berries for them to enjoy.

Frogs and Toads:

Natural pest control. They eat caterpillars, cutworms, bugs, beetles, grubs, slugs, grasshoppers, and numerous other detrimental insects.

Invite frogs and toads to your landscape by offering:

A place to hide. Frogs and toads are shy. They prefer a cool, shaded area with lots of moisture and plants. Turn over a flowerpot and they will make a house.

"Nature teaches beasts to know their friends." ~ William Shakespeare

The gray turtle dove darted from the mulberry tree to the wooden nest box and back again. Thinking there must be eggs, I grabbed my camera and discovered a baby dove nestled in a hollowed nest with the mother bird proudly standing guard. The sounds of gentle cooing surrounded this bucolic scene. I felt blessed that these birds chose my garden to settle.

If you want a healthy, glorious summer garden, beneficial insects, arachnids, birds, amphibians and reptiles must call your landscape "home."

Many people scream at the sight of a snake or a lizard and start swatting when they witness a spider. However, these are beneficial biologicals devouring the insects and predators that capture prey that destroy your garden.

A pond allows them to lay eggs. Have fun watching tadpoles.

Lizards:

Reptiles are excellent eaters of garden pests including slugs and harmful insects.

A plethora of lizards living in your landscape is an indicator of a healthy ecosystem. The food you grow will be free of heavy metals and pesticides since lizards cannot thrive in a hazardous environment.

Invite lizards to your landscape by offering:

Only natural methods of pest control.

Avoidance of all weed killers.

Mulch to regulate moisture in the soil.

Rocks, bricks, or stones for sunbathing.

A saucer or small container with water for drinking.

Snakes:

Garter snakes and kingsnakes are especially beneficial in our area because they eat insects and rodents. One snake can devour an entire rat family in two weeks. Kingsnakes also kill rattlesnakes and keep them away. Make sure to learn the good snakes from the poisonous ones.

Invite snakes to your landscape by offering:

A hiding place in bushes, tree stumps, driftwood, or even metal panels.

A water source on the ground, a small birdbath, fountain, or the "butterfly bowl".

Ladybugs:

Also known as Lady beetles or Ladybird beetles, their larvae look like alligators. Both the adults and larvae are voracious general pest predators of aphids, beetles, caterpillars, lace bugs, mealybugs, mites, scale, whiteflies, and insect eggs. The larvae consume over 40 aphids per hour and an adult ladybug will consume over 5,000 aphids in a lifetime. If you have a small garden or a minimal pest population in a large garden, they will fly away. Rejoice because your garden is organically balanced.

Invite ladybugs to your landscape by offering:

A wide range of flowering plants to attract and keep them on site.

Hoverflies:

Also known as syrphid flies or flower flies, hoverflies earned their name by hovering over flowers to sip the nectar, much like hummingbirds. They look similar to bees but they do not sting and are not harmful to humans. The adults are primarily pollinators and the larvae are pest predators, crawling along plant surfaces searching for prey. They seize the insect, suck out its contents, and discard the skin. They mimic bees and wasps to protect themselves from predators but have two wings instead of four.

Invite hoverflies to your landscape by offering:

A variety of nectar and pollen-producing plants such as aster, calendula, cornflower, cosmos, dill, fennel, lavender marigolds, mint, statice, zinnia, wild mustard, and sunflowers.

Food throughout every season by timing plantings for continuous blooms.

Spiders:

Spiders help maintain a healthy balance in your garden by eating harmful pests from spring through winter. By controlling the bad insects, they reduce plant pathogens that damage plant tissues. Most spiders are peaceful. The most common web builder is the yellow and black spider, and the black wolf spiders are active hunters.

Invite spiders to your landscape by offering:

Grass clippings, mulch, lush bushes, and perennials for habitat.

Cover crops such as clover and vetch and hedges like boxwoods are havens for spiders.

Sunflowers, vining beans, and corn as well as other tall flowers are excellent for webs.

Grow a diversity of plants, eliminate pesticides, herbicides, and insecticides to attract beneficial insects, birds, spiders, reptiles, and numerous other guardians of our garden galaxy. By providing the basic needs of food, habitat, water, and shelter, you and your family will enjoy increased outdoor amusement while learning an appreciation of nature. Your garden will be their dinner table and their bedroom. Know your friends and protect them.

Happy Gardening. Happy Growing.



An elaborate bird nest with eggs. Photos Cynthia Brian



A frog sits on the patio rug. Photos Cynthia Brian



A King snake keeps the voles, moles, rats, and rattlers away. Photos Cynthia Brian



Ladybugs in various stages on barley stems. Bumblebees and hoverflies pollinate the lavender. Cynthia Brian is awed by a nest on a redwood tree. Cynthia Brian, The Goddess Gardener, is available for hire to help you prepare for your spring garden. Raised in the vineyards of Napa County, Cynthia is a New York Times best-selling author, actor, radio personality, speaker, media and writing coach, as well as the Founder and Executive Director of Be the Star You Are!r 501 c3. Tune into Cynthia's StarStyler Radio Broadcast at www.StarStyleRadio.com. Buy copies of her best-selling books, including, Chicken Soup for the Gardener's Soul, Growing with the Goddess Gardener, and Be the Star You Are! Millennials to Boomers at www.cynthiabrian.com/online-store. Cynthia is available for virtual writing projects, garden consults, and inspirational lectures. Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com www.GoddessGardener.com

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