

2007 AWARD OF MERIT WINNER

Other Garden Friends

By Steve Steps

Master Consulting Rosarian

Spring is a wonderful time of the year. Not only do we get to see the first beautiful blooms of the new year, but we also get to see some of our “other garden friends.”

Diana and I have not used toxic sprays in our rose gardens for over 20 years. You might think “bad bugs” would overrun our yard, but instead we have relatively few bugs in our yard – except for this time of year.



Mating Ladybug beetles

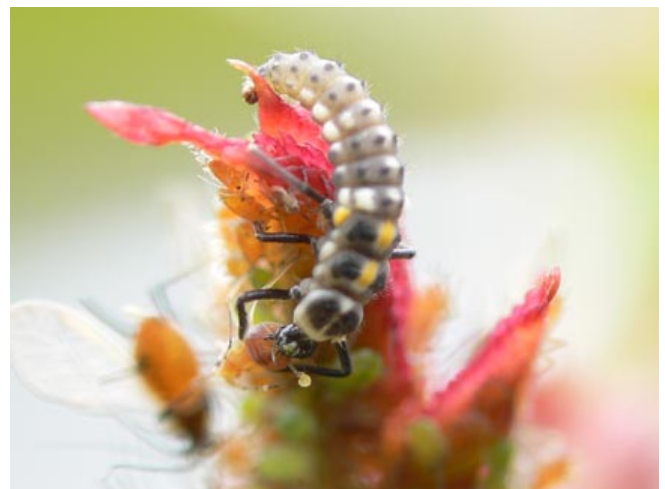
The reason we have so few “bad bugs” in our yard is because of all of the wonderful rose friends that help out. I am sure everyone is familiar with the adult Ladybug beetle. I think everyone played with adult ladybugs when they were growing up. How can a child resist such a colorful looking and friendly bug?

Are you familiar with the other stages in a ladybug’s life? Ladybug eggs are yellow to orange in color and usually you only find them on the underneath side of leaves. If you have rust on your roses, you might even confuse the eggs for rust.



Ladybug larva and eggs

The larva form eats more aphids than the adult ladybug. Both are plentiful in our yard this time of year. I think I found about one adult ladybug and one larva on every one of our rose bushes. Sometimes it takes some patience to see that each bush is teeming with life.



Ladybug larva having a feast of aphids

I think sometimes our rose friends have a sense of fashion. For example, what better rose for a ladybug larva to be seen on than a color-coordinating ‘Just Joey?’



Ladybug larva color-coordinated with 'Just Joey'

We may not always have “rich and famous” people visiting our yard, but we do have the “famous” visit us each year. The Lacewing larva may not look very pretty to you, but Hollywood sure liked that face.



Movie Star – Lacewing larva

The movie, Star Trek II – The Wrath of Khan, features the Lacewing larva in a principle role. Personally, we happen to think the adult form is far more beautiful.



Adult Lacewing

The adult lacewing has almost completely transparent wings with fine veins creating a “lace” look to them. Lacewing adults are most often seen in flight. Their green color and nearly transparent wings allow them to blend in extremely well on rose leaves. I have watched a lacewing land on a rose and then spent many minutes trying to locate it after it landed. They can really blend in well!

Probably the most important beneficial “friend” in our yard is the Syrphid fly. It took us awhile to recognize the adults “hovering” around the roses. We just thought they were some type of housefly.

However, if you watch them very closely, you will see them lay a small, white oval egg near clusters of aphids. What hatches out is a larva that probably eats more of the aphids in our yard than any of our other garden friends.



“Hover” fly – Syrphid fly adult

We originally thought the larva was a “bad bug” eating our rose bushes. However, we looked closely and found no leaf damage near them. Watching closer, we then saw them eating aphids – and do they ever eat a LOT of aphids!



Syrphid fly larva

We are so glad we did not rush out to kill the larva. Now that we know it is a “good bug,” it joins the above garden friends and others that we welcome each spring to our yard.

These friends do such an effective job eating the bad bugs that in just a few weeks our yard is nearly clean. Without a food supply, most of our friends then leave our yard and we will not see them again until next spring. However, we look forward to seeing them with almost as much anticipation as we do for the spring bloom of roses!

All photos by Steve Steps, Saratoga, CA