

## Bio-Fit Your Garden

Remember when, after only a short drive in spring or summer, your windshield would be covered with bugs? Now think: when was the last time you had bugs on your windshield?

Where have all the bugs gone? The insect population is being depleted. Urban sprawl, the cultivation of acres and acres of sterile lawns, and the introduction of invasive and non-native plants have seriously reduced habitat and breeding space for all invertebrates. Pesticides kill many more.



Insects aren't accidents of nature or pesky things to get rid of. They play important roles in our environment. Many work as predators keeping other insects under control. Others do a recycling and composting job. Without insects to do the dirty work, we would be up to our 'you-know-whats' in refuse and garbage.

One insect whose plight we are familiar with is the honey bee. European honey bees are employed to pollinate crops all over the world and, like all other insects, are now in trouble. Beekeepers globally lose about a third of their hives each year. Some crops such as almonds, apples, and blueberries are highly dependent on bees as pollinators and will fail without them. The situation has become so critical in China that workers are actually hand-pollinating fruit trees. There are just not enough bees to do the job!

The fate of honey bees is just part of the story. Remember the windshield? The disappearing insects include our native bees. They also have been affected by the chemicals we've used and the things we've done to the earth. Those native bees are vital to the pollination of field crops such as soy and alfalfa. They pollinate our tomatoes and our flowers. On a more personal level, without bees, chocolate and coffee would go! No bees, no seeds. We need our bees. We need all our insects!

You and I can't change the state of the whole planet, but there is something that we can do.

We can **bio-fit** our part of the earth -- our gardens. That one place that we control can become a safe haven for the insects. Here are some actions that will make invertebrates welcome in your garden:

- ❖ Plant natives instead of exotics and non-native hybrids.
- ❖ Provide accommodation such as bee houses.
- ❖ Don't cut back the garden in fall. Leave places for invertebrates to over-winter.
- ❖ Never ever use pesticides of any kind.
- ❖ Create a wildlife habitat with a log or a brush pile.
- ❖ Reduce your turf. Plant shrubs or bushes – or maybe a prairie.
- ❖ Plant a wild cherry tree or a willow or an oak.
- ❖ Add a small water feature without fish to accommodate frogs and dragonflies and to provide a source of water for the invertebrates your harbour.

If you and I and your neighbour and my neighbour and so on and so on converted just a little space for invertebrates, what a difference we'd make. AND if your habitat space abutted your neighbour's habitat space, that would be even better!



This spring, bio-fit your garden and tell your neighbours what you're doing and why.

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