

Friendly insect's fact sheet 2

Lacewings are welcome in the garden. The female lacewing lays about 300 eggs, and each developing larva eats between 1000 and 10,000 aphids in its lifetime.

Description

There are three types: green, brown and powdery lacewings. Larvae are swift and active aphid predators; they also eat mites, leafhoppers, beetles, scale insects and caterpillars. The adults feed on nectar. Eggs are usually laid on fine, long stalks, found singly or in batches.

Adults

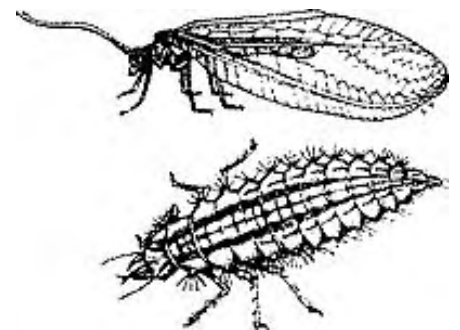
The green lacewing is the largest and most conspicuous (20-48mm wing-span) with two pairs of lacy wings and long antennae. The brown lacewing is smaller (15-20mm wing-span), and the powdery lacewing smaller still (7-8mm wing-span) and has a white powdery coating over body. Of the three types, the green lacewing (*Chrysoperla carnea*) is the only one to survive the winter in the adult form.

Larvae

Length: powdery 3-4mm; brown 7-9mm; green 7-3mm.

Colour: variable - creamy/grey/yellow/red/brown/purplish.

They are similar to ladybird larvae but more delicate and bristly and have distinctive curved mouthparts.



New research

Horticulture Research International (East Malling) have been monitoring the lacewing population at an organic hop orchard in Kent after providing artificial hibernation sites. A simple, home-made refuge has been used, made out of a plastic drink bottle! Best results were obtained when the bottles were located at the tops of hop poles in the orchard, where the maximum amount of foliage is found. The optimum density is still to be established, but every 2 metres is being tried. The bottles are emptied at the end of February for assessment, and in 1992 contained an average of ten in each.

To construct a lacewing hotel:

Cut the base off a large (1 or 2 litre) plastic bottle. There's no need to wash them out. Cut a piece of corrugated cardboard about 80-100cm long to fit the height of the bottle, bits of an old cardboard box will do. Roll it up and put inside, make sure it doesn't extend beyond the bottle. Carefully, use a metal skewer to make a hole through the middle of the bottle and cardboard, push a wooden barbeque skewer through and trim the ends, leave about 1cm either side. Leave the lid on to prevent water getting in, but add a loop of string, held on by the lid to hang the hotel up..

Location

Suspend the hotels from branches of trees, shrubs, hedges or against fences at the level of maximum foliage. As adult lacewings are attracted by house lights, it may be that placing the hotels near windows will be beneficial.

Timing

The hotels should be in place by the middle of August when the lacewings will start looking for winter shelter. This will mean that the lacewings will be on site in the spring, to deal with aphids straight away, before they become a problem!

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