Factsheet: Attracting bugs

Have you ever been on safari looking for mini beasts in your backyard? What sort of creepy crawlies did you find? Backyard bugs can include beetles, spiders, insects, ants, bees, wasps, butterflies and moths. All these bugs can be great indicators of the health of our local environments so if you had trouble finding any in your backyard or only found one or two species you may want to create a more bug friendly environment to encourage them.

There are many reasons why we should encourage bugs in our gardens, not only are they fun to find and watch, they provide an important food source for other creatures such as birds, lizards and frogs. Many bugs act as biological control agents, they actually help remove pest bugs by eating them or encouraging creatures that do. Many of our small native bird species that have been lost from our suburbs are insectivores, that is they eat insects, so encouraging bugs in your garden can help bring back birds such as wrens, fantails, robins, whistlers and thornbills.

Like all living things bugs require shelter and food so creating suitable habitat is the key. The insect world is enormous, it is estimated that there are over 85,000 species in Australia with more being discovered all the time. Each species has its own requirements but the following recommendations will certainly help you create a world of mini beasts in your garden.

- Bugs need to shelter, so create safe places for them with rocks, logs and mulch. Leaf litter is often teeming with bug life, that helps recycle and compost plant matter and quickly break down dead animals and rotting fruit.
- A good layer of mulch also helps retain soil moisture which is great for your plants. Mulch also enables insects to find a safe place to escape the heat of the day and avoid dehydration.
- Growing local native plant species helps re-establish the relationship that exists between our native bugs and the original bushland that once grew in what is now your backyard. Gum trees with rough bark on their trunks provide homes for all sorts of bugs and can increase backyard biodiversity (that is the number of bug species living in your garden) enormously.
- Having a water feature in your garden such as a birdbath or pond will attract many species of bugs, especially those that require an aquatic habitat for a stage of their life cycle. Dragonflies are just one of the species that spend a large proportion of their lives under water before emerging as winged creatures.
- One of the most important things we can all do to encourage bugs is to avoid reaching for the chemical sprays every time we see one. Using chemicals to control one bug often results in us wiping out many others, so only use chemicals if you have to. If we allow caterpillars to eat a share of our garden plants we will see a lot more butterflies in the future.
- Finally if you have the space in your garden, why not dedicate a corner to local wildlife and bugs. Create a quiet area where a pile of rocks or wood allows creatures to live undisturbed by us or our domesticated pets. Then you will always have a place to see amazing and wonderful things.

find out more at: www.unisa.edu.au/barbarahardy