



A spider web awaits me along our garden path

LEANN LOCHER

Bugalicious

the sassy gardener

BY LEANN LOCHER



I've been walking through our garden waving a broom as I go. Spider webs and their owners are everywhere come late summer and into fall—gardens are busy places for these spinning ladies. I've come to expect them in August and September, but not everyone welcomes them as much as I do. And I have to say, people who scream at the sight of a bug get on my last nerve. People, you do *not* need to have your yard sprayed at the first sight of an insect. Unless you know what kind of bug it is, it's quite likely it's a good one—the kind that eats the bad bugs—so let it be and take a few deep breaths. Just had to get that off my chest...

Here's the scoop on spiders: They're arachnids, not insects. The creatures actively spinning webs in my garden right now are most

likely garden spiders, or orb weavers. They like to spin elaborate webs and often wait right in the center for their next victim—I mean, dinner. Hopefully it's not my face, but even if I do walk into their webs unknowingly, they don't bother me: I just like to make sure the little guy isn't somewhere in my hair. They're spinning like mad this time of year, doing a little nesting as the females prepare to lay their eggs in the fall.

So there are bugs who do damage in your garden, and there are bugs who eat those damaging bugs. Our job is to know which are good and which are bad, and help to encourage the good ones to stick around. Here's a primer.

Good bugs in the garden:

Ladybugs—They're not just pretty, they're also great eaters of those dreaded aphids. The best way to promote ladybugs in your garden, as well as other beneficial insects, is to not use pesticides. Pesticides can't tell the difference between pesky and beneficial insects and will simply kill them all. Once we stopped using pesticides in our garden, the ladybug hotline passed along the message there was a nice, big

aphid buffet at our place and the ladies came with empty stomachs. You can buy ladybugs at garden centers, but there's no guarantee they'll stick around once you open that bag.

Hoverflies—Often mistaken for bees, adult hoverflies fly more quickly (or hover) than bees, but their larvae like to eat aphids and scale insects. Munch, munch, munch: Should you see hoverflies, be a happy gardener.

Green and Brown Lacewings—Both the larvae and adult lacewings prey on aphids, mealybugs and other small insects: bonus score! Lacewings are about a half-inch long with large, light green or brown wings and antennae.

Plant to attract beneficial bugs. OSU's Department of Horticulture has researched what plants attract predators to pests in Oregon. They include cilantro, yarrow, tansy, sweet alyssum, spearmint, crimson clover and flowering buckwheat. In fact, if you have a bad case of aphids, planting cilantro and sweet alyssum can help to lure hoverflies.

Speaking of bad bugs, let's talk *Wicked Bugs*. There aren't many books that make me mutter out loud as I read them, but *Wicked*

Bugs: The Louse That Conquered Napoleon's Army & Other Diabolical Insects did just that. "Good god," "Oh my lord" and "Wow" could be heard as I turned the pages of Amy Stewart's latest jaunt with wicked things. (She's also the author of *Wicked Plants: The Weed That Killed Lincoln's Mother & Other Botanical Atrocities*.) I've now been schooled in many a gross bug habit, including the likes of the filth fly, death-watch beetle and the scabies mite. If their names make your skin crawl, their habits will really get you going, or fascinate you, especially when it comes to sex.

Did you know a female praying mantid will often bite off the head of the male she's copulating with? Or that the male Australian golden orb-weaver spider can find himself unable to detangle from his mate and will break off a part of his own sexual organ, leaving it inside the female? I can hear you from here: "Wow" is right.

Besides the amazing sex stories of bugs, the book is full of gross-out tales perfect to share with your preteen niece, which is precisely what I did recently. Stewart has a wry voice and style, making this a great page-turner. I'm still a defender of bugs, but this *Wicked* tome has me never wanting to come in contact with a Brazilian caterpillar. Ever. Never. Ever. **LO**

LEANN LOCHER is an OSU Extension Master Gardener and gardens with plenty of bugs and at least 2,472 spiders in her North Portland garden. Read more about her explorations at lelono.com or connect at facebook.com/sassygardener.

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