

Provision of hibernation sites will not guarantee that these insects will stay in your garden all year round. To survive they must have food – aphids! and if there are none in your garden they will fly off to find some elsewhere.

Early in the year nettles will have nettle aphids on them, these are specific to the nettle and do not attack other plants in your garden.

A small patch of nettles, in a fairly sunny position, is one of the best assets of the wildlife garden. They will not only provide hungry ladybirds and lacewings coming out of hibernation with vital sustenance to replenish their depleted food reserves but will also provide vital egg laying sites for their first broods.

If you don't like the idea of a patch of nettles rampaging through your flower beds, try growing some in a tomato 'growbag' - this will confine them to one spot. Cut a third of the patch down every month and you will have them in different stages of growth throughout the year so the ladybirds, lacewings and butterflies (Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock, Comma and Red Admiral) whose caterpillars feed on them can select the best for their egg laying. The aphids these nettles will support will provide the ladybirds and lacewings with a good start then, as their numbers increase, they will move off to seek aphids on other plants in your garden.

Having welcomed these attractive and useful insects to your garden and got them working for you, don't spray your plants with insecticide if you see any aphids - it will kill the ladybird and lacewing larvae as well!

Wycombe Wildlife Group

Among its activities Wycombe Wildlife Group surveys and promotes the management of wild habitats for the benefit of wildlife and advises on and promotes wildlife gardening.

Information about the Group can be obtained from the Group's web site at: www.wycombewildlife.org.uk

Gardens for Beneficial Insects

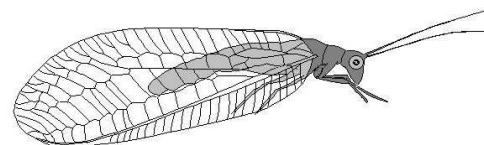


Ladybirds

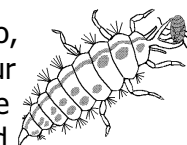
Most species of ladybird are carnivorous. Adults & larvae of the 2-spot and the 7-spot, and the recently arrived Harlequin, feed on greenfly & blackfly so the effort you put into making any of the insect hibernation boxes described in this leaflet will pay dividends.



Ladybird larva devouring an aphid



Lacewing larvae are similar in appearance to, but much paler in colour than those of the larvae of the common ladybird species which are black.



Lacewings

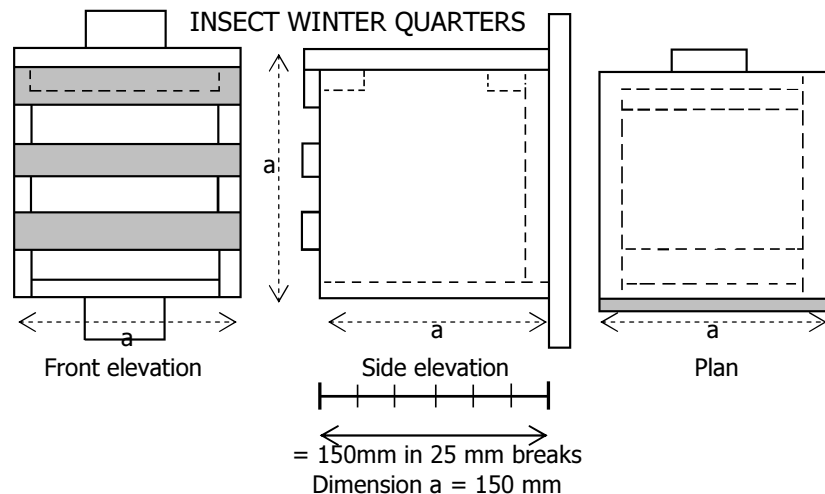
The larval and adult stages of these delicate green, winged insects also feed voraciously on greenfly & other small insect pests. Common green lacewings become pinkish-fawn when they hibernate, but change back to green in the spring.

From these brief notes you can appreciate the advantages of providing a welcome for these insects in your garden. Both ladybirds and lacewings hibernate as adults in the winter months. If you provide them with safe places to hibernate you will have lots of them around in the following spring and summer to control those unwelcome pests - greenfly.

One of the commonest places for these insects to hibernate in a garden is among the leaves at the foot of a hedge - along with lots of other insects. A fact exploited by Blackbirds that will scratch around amongst the leaves in winter looking for tasty morsels to eat. So, not the safest place for these insects to hibernate but some will survive, so leave those leaves under the hedge.

The two devices described in this leaflet will provide a safer place for these useful and attractive insects to hibernate.

The first structure, the Insect Winter Quarters, is a wooden box with a slatted front which allows air to circulate but stops the loose packing, amongst which the insects will hibernate, from falling out.



The box can be made with a loose top, as shown in the drawings, so it can be removed and the box cleaned out in the summer. Alternatively, nail the top on but attach the slats with brass screws so that they can be taken off to allow cleaning of the box. Do not treat the wood with a wood preservative.

Fill the box with a loose mixture of dry leaves and straw. Attach the box by means of the batten on the back to a fence or post in the garden in early autumn. Take the box down in mid-November and put it in an unheated outhouse (garage or shed) to give the hibernating insects some protection against frost.

In the spring put the box out in a sunny spot in the garden and the lacewings and ladybirds should emerge and fly off to find a mate, and the larvae they produce will search out and destroy the aphids in your garden.

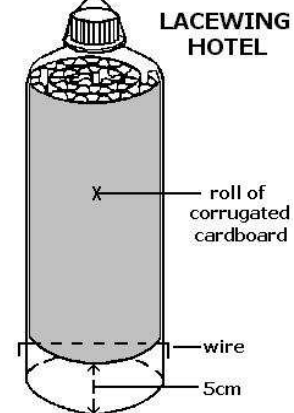
Another good idea, promoted by several organisations, for helping these insects survive the winter is a 'Lacewing Hotel'.

Take an empty, 1 or 2 litre, plastic bottle and cut off the base. Take a sheet of corrugated cardboard about 100cm long x 5cm shorter than the length of the bottle. Roll the corrugated cardboard up and push it into the bottle (see drawing). Secure it in place by pushing a piece of thin wire through the bottle just below the cardboard roll. You will find the wire will go through easily and not break the plastic if you heat the end with a match. When the wire has cooled, bend both ends of the wire down to prevent it slipping out.

Screw the top on tight to keep the rain out. Tie some string round the neck of the bottle and suspend it from the branches of trees or shrubs at the level of maximum foliage.

Get them made and in place by about mid-autumn as this is when the lacewings will start to search out places to hibernate. As

lacewings are attracted by house lights, it may be beneficial to hang the hotels up by lighted windows.



As with the hibernation box, it may be a good idea to put the 'hotel' in an outhouse from about mid-November, putting it outside again in the spring.

Many ladybird hibernation sites are used year after year, but it is not understood how the ladybirds find them. It may be that they produce a scent or pheromone that impregnates the material of the site that allows others to "home in" on it.