



## Attracting insects and other invertebrates

Invertebrates (animals without backbones), including insects, spiders and worms, are one of the largest and most diverse faunal groups, yet they are the least understood and appreciated group.

Invertebrates play a significant role in nature as decomposers, pollinators, and prey for many wildlife species. They are an important food source for many larger animals, such as birds, bats, frogs, lizards and bandicoots.



Insects play a very important role in pollination, making vegetable crops and fruit trees much more abundant and successful. Bees (both honey and native) are not solely responsible for this; butterflies, moths, ants, beetles and native wasps are some of the many different types of insects that also assist with pollination.



Images: Top L Black Jezebel - *Delias nigrina*, Bottom L Red dragonfly, Bottom R Bladder cicada - *Cystosoma saundersii*



Many plants have evolved in a way that attracts insects, specifically for the purpose of encouraging pollination by having alluring scents, bright colours or specific flower shape or form, to ensure successful pollination and cross fertilisation. Plants benefit from doing so, as this enables them to reproduce, which means survival of their species – they provide rewards of pollen and nectar in return for the service.

The structure of flowers often influences the type of insect they attract for pollination. Their shape may be suited to insects with long tongues, or short tongues, buzzing wings or hairy legs.

Invertebrates on the surface and within the ground play a vital role in decomposing leaf litter and other organic matter, as they use this as a food source. This recycles nutrients back into the soil and rejuvenates soil health and productivity.

Though you may have fears about them, spiders are important in your garden. Spiders eat insects and other invertebrates, while birds and other animals in turn, eat them. Do watch out for harmful spiders, such as red-backs or white-tailed spiders, as they can cause nasty, painful bites.



*Image: St Andrew's Cross spider Argiope keyserlingi*

Many species of spider weave beautiful webs. It's fascinating to watch how they create these. Spider webs are particularly important for a number of bird species that depend on them for successfully binding their nests. These include robins, grey fantails, many honeyeaters, and brown thorn-bills.

Creating a diversity of insects and other invertebrates in your garden will achieve a natural balance, reducing the risk of dominance of undesirable invertebrates, such as aphids, scale or leaf-eating insects.