

# Facts about Garden Friends

## Ants

- There are about 22,000 species of ants.
- Queen ants live for 3 years, but worker ants only live for 6 months.
- Ants live in big groups, and they work together to find food and protect each other.
- Ants make air bubbles in the soil by tunneling through it, which makes the soil healthier.
- Ants eat other bugs called aphids, which can hurt your garden.
- All the ants in the world put together weigh more than all the humans in the world.
- Ants live almost everywhere on Earth.
- One species of ant that lives in North Carolina is the carpenter ant, which gets its name because it builds its nest inside of wood.

## Ladybugs

- There are about 4,000 species of ladybugs worldwide.
- Ladybugs usually live for about one year, and their larva hatch after 4-10 days.
- Ladybugs are good for your garden because they eat a lot of plant-eating insects like aphids.
- Most ladybugs are shiny red with black markings, but some are orange, yellow, and black.
- Ladybugs can have no spots or as many as 24 spots. They have the same number of spots their whole life.
- Ladybugs also eat pollen, and as a result are attracted to many plants in the garden, most of which have an umbrella shaped flower like fennel, dill, cilantro, and wild carrot.
- NASA took ladybugs to space to study their eating habits (Ladybugs have been to space!)
- “We love ladybugs, don’t ya know. They eat bad bugs so plants can grow!”

## Spiders

- There are about 40,000 species of spiders worldwide.
- Spiders make webs out of silk in which they catch insects to eat.
- Spiders usually live for less than a year, but the oldest spider ever found was over 40 years old!
- Spiders are different from other insects because they have 8 legs rather than 6, 2 body parts rather than 3, and no wings or antennae.
- Spiders have eight eyes, but only two of them can see shapes (the others only see light).
- When they are young, spiders feed on plant nectar.
- Spiders are helpful in your garden because they eat insects that eat the plants you grow.
- The Spruce Fir Moss Spider is an endangered species of spider that lives in the mountains of Western North Carolina. It is a very small tarantula that lives only on the tallest mountain peaks in this area.

## Bees

- There are 20,000 known species of bees worldwide.
- North Carolina’s state bee is the Western honey bee.

- Queen bees live between 2 and 5 years, but worker bees (drones) live 40-50 days.
- Bees use a process called pollination to carry pollen from one plant to another, which fertilizes the plants and helps them bear fruit.
- Bees live and work in groups, and each bee has a different job that helps the group find food and protect itself.
- Most groups of bees have a queen, who lays all of the eggs that will soon become other bees
- Only female bees can sting you.
- Bees are usually attracted to flowers that are blue, purple, and yellow like cosmos, zinnias, sunflowers, and dahlias.
- Some bees make honey from the nectar they collect from flowers and trees.
- Worker bees, the ones who find most of the food for the colony, communicate with each other through several dances like the “waggle dance” indicating that food is far away and the “round dance” indicating that food is nearby. Bees also communicate about food location through odors.
- Bees can travel up to five miles to get nectar, but usually stay within one mile of their hive.

## **Butterflies**

- Butterflies can live up to a year, but most live only a few weeks.
- Butterflies are like many flowers for their nectar, like dill, daisies, fennel, marigolds, and sunflowers.
- Butterflies fly best when they are warm, so they bask in the sun in your garden to soak up the sun’s warmth.
- Male butterflies like to hang out near puddles and eat the nutrients out of the water.
- In a process called metamorphosis, a caterpillar turns into a special case called a chrysalis, which then, after many changes happen inside the case, turns into a butterfly.
- Some butterflies, like the monarch, migrate long distances to avoid overly hot or cold temperatures. Some monarchs have been known to cross the Atlantic Ocean.

## **Fireflies**

- There are 2,000 species of firefly.
- A firefly lives for one to two years, but only for five to thirty days as an adult.
- Fireflies are winged beetles that glow yellow, because of a special chemical in their bodies, to talk to other fireflies. Baby fireflies use their glow to warn off predators. Adult girl and boy fireflies use their glows to ask each other out on dates.
- Sometimes, a large group of fireflies start blinking all at the same time in a rhythm.
- Fireflies are helpful in your garden because they eat snails, slugs, and other harmful insects.
- Fireflies like to live in marshes or wet, wooded areas where their larvae have plenty of food

## **Praying Mantis**

- There are about 2,200 species of mantis worldwide.
- The “praying” part of the mantis’ name comes from the way it bends its front legs into a position that makes it look like it is praying.

- A praying mantis lives for up to one year, and can be up to six inches long.
- Mantises eat mostly insects, but have been known also to eat larger animals like lizards, frogs, and even mice.
- Mantis eggs can be used to kill harmful insects in gardens.
- Mantises are not very picky eaters; they eat both good and bad insects in your garden

## **Earthworms**

- Earthworms are very good for your garden because they turn large pieces of soil into better, smaller pieces called humus.
- You can find earthworms in your garden just by digging in the soil.
- Most earthworms live for about six years.
- Since earthworms live and move in tunnels underground, the channels they create help the soil to absorb water
- Worms can lay up to 1,000 eggs in a six month period, and they lay eggs every week or so.
- Worms will eat banana skins, apple cores, cardboard, paper, melon skins, sawdust, and many other things.
- A worm casting is worm manure, which gardeners spread around their gardens to give plants the nutrients they need to be healthy.

## **Centipede**

- There are estimated to be about 8,000 species of centipedes worldwide.
- Centipedes eat ants, worms, and even other centipedes.
- Centipedes can live between five and seven years.
- Centipedes can have between 22 and 298 legs, and have an odd number of pairs of legs.
- The longest centipede in the world, called the Amazonian giant centipede, is 1ft long.
- Overwatering in the garden can make millipedes attack your vegetable plants.

## **Dragonflies**

- There are more than 5,000 species of dragonfly in the world.
- Dragonflies are some of the fastest insects in the world. An Australian variety can fly up to 36 miles per hour, but most fly between 22 and 34 miles per hour.
- Dragonflies spend most of their lives as larvae in water (4 years), and they only leave the water and grow wings at the very end of their life (1 month), after they go through a metamorphosis.
- When dragonflies are larvae, they eat mosquito larva and tiny fish, and when they grow wings they eat other flying insects like mosquitoes.
- Dragonflies do not sting or bite, and they can be helpful in the garden because they eat pests like mosquitoes.
- The largest dragonfly in the world lives in Costa Rica and has a 7 ½ inch wingspan.