

Damsels and Dragons

By Annie Mollock, Gallatin Empire Garden Club

Dragonflies are beautiful to watch as they fly over open areas of water, ponds, rivers, streams, marshes, lawns and meadows. They can fly forwards, backwards and sideways and they can also hover. Their neon colors attract our eye. They are great hunters with voracious appetites, good eyesight and can fly up to 35 miles per hour. Their prey includes mosquitoes, moths, bloodworms, snails, gnats and other insects. Dragonflies in turn provide food for adult fish, frogs and birds.

Dragonflies are sometimes confused with damselflies. The major difference between the two is their flight pattern. Dragonflies are powerful and direct whereas damselflies are more flittery. Both are beneficial to your garden.



Providing a suitable habitat is vital to maintaining their populations. Maintaining wetlands of all types will keep these valuable insects flying in our landscapes and help provide effective control of insect pests. For the water gardener these bugs are essential. The gardener can encourage a healthy pond ecosystem that supports all of the flora and fauna by not using pesticides anywhere in the garden.

All species of dragonfly need access to water. Most dragonflies are particular about the ponds they'll inhabit. They require shelter, sunlight, unpolluted water, tall plants and hunting areas. Pond vegetation is critical for dragonflies because the nymphs crawl up the water plants when they emerge and make their transformation from water creatures to flying adult dragonflies. The plants that surround your pond are just as important. Let the grasses and rushes grow and plant some shrubs within a few feet of the water to provide more perching sites. Put some flat rocks near your dragonfly's pond edge and around your garden. They like to bask on the rocks in the sunlight.

If you are trying to attract dragonflies to control mosquitoes, make sure you don't have any bug zappers in your yard as they will zap the dragonflies and are not an effective way to control mosquitoes.