

Beneficial Insects



Dragonflies

Common and Scientific Names:

- Common: Devil's darning needle, horse stinger, mosquito hawk
- Scientific: Odonata: *Anisoptera*

Description

Dragonflies have long slender bodies and membranous wings with a crowded network of veins, and large heads made up almost entirely of multifaceted, compound eyes. They rest with their wings held horizontally. The species is nearly 250 million years old and remains relatively unchanged to this day.

Life Cycle

Dragonflies go through three stages — egg, nymph and adult.

First, adults lay eggs on or near the water. After three to five weeks, eggs hatch into nymphs or naiads. These naiads can live up to three years buried in the mud or attached to submerged plants.

Once naiads are grown, they leave the mud or water, rest on the stem of an aquatic plant, and an adult dragonfly crawls out of the naiad skin. The adult then lives for approximately six weeks. In that time frame they must mate, and a female needs to lay eggs for the life cycle to begin again.

Habitat and Preferred Plants

Dragonflies prefer an aquatic environment and will eat whatever prey is most plentiful, hunting where gnats, mayflies, caddisflies, or termites abound.

How They Benefit the Environment

While dragonflies consume any number of noisome insects, their appetite for mosquitoes makes them a

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friend of the gardener.

As with damselflies, the presence and abundance of dragonflies can serve as an indicator of ecosystem quality.

What We Can Do to Support Them and Increase Their Numbers

Dragonflies are attracted to sites which offer a wide variety of microhabitats, prey, and clean water.

Consider creating a small pond – or even a wooden half barrel to draw them in. Ponds or water features should have varying depths, be located where there are a variety of plants, and be in a location protected from wind, with midday sun. Dragonflies like to warm themselves the sun and a few rocks near the edge can be particularly inviting.

Sources:

- <https://hortnews.extension.iastate.edu/dragonflies-and-damselflies>
- <https://ucmp.berkeley.edu/arthropoda/uniramia/odonatoida.html>
- <https://ucanr.edu/sites/MarinMG/files/116742.pdf>