

Beneficial Insects



Syrphid Flies

Common and Scientific Names:

- Common: Hover flies, flower flies
- Scientific: Syrphidae

Description

Syrphid flies are robust to slender flies, about 1/8 to 1 inch (4–25 mm) long, varying by species. Their heads are roughly the width of their abdomen or wider and they have large eyes with distinct antennae. Many adults have black bodies with bands or stripes of orange, yellow or white, and closely resemble stinging bees or wasps.

Life Cycle

Syrphids have four life stages: egg, larva, pupa, and adult. After mating, females seek to lay eggs in a habitat that is suitable for their larvae to develop.

Syrphid flies overwinter as pupae in the soil. In early spring, adults begin to emerge just as aphid populations begin to increase. Eggs are laid on aphid infested leaves or plant stems and in several days hatch into soft-bodied maggot-like larvae. Larvae feed for 7 to 10 days, then drop to the soil to pupate. There can be three to seven overlapping generations each year.

Habitat and Preferred Plants

Most species of syrphid flies feed on aphids or mealybugs, with some syrphids preying on ants, caterpillars, froghoppers, psyllids, scales, other insects or mites. They have even been known to attack small European corn borer and corn earworm larvae. Each aphid-feeding larva can eat about 100 to 400 aphids before it pupates.

Beneficial Insects



Adult flies need flower and nectar sources and are attracted to weedy borders or mixed garden plantings infested with aphids. Especially attractive flowers for syrphid flies include wild carrot or Queen Anne's lace, wild mustard, sweet alyssum, coriander, dill, and other small-flowered herbs.

How They Benefit the Environment

Syrphid flies are effective in controlling aphid populations in gardens and mixed plots. They will be most noticeable in the latter half of the growing season, after aphid infestations are established.

What We Can Do to Support Them and Increase Their Numbers

The best way to attract syrphid flies is by planting flowers, but they also need aphids for their larvae to develop. A "pest free" yard reduces the abundance and diversity of any predators and parasitoids that rely on "pests" as a food source.

Source:

- <https://www2.ipm.ucanr.edu/natural-enemies/syrphids/>
- <https://hort.extension.wisc.edu/articles/hover-flower-or-syrphid-flies-syrphidae/>
- <http://ippc2.orst.edu/mint/syrphidfact.pdf>