

Building an Insect Hotel

As city and town lines expand, we lose precious habitat not only for our native plant communities, but also for all kinds of critters that call those communities home. Building an insect hotel is a great way to give our native insects and animals the food and shelter they need to survive. It provides habitat for sensitive species that would otherwise, literally, be left in the cold. It also increases the biodiversity of your garden by attracting a wide range of creatures like lady beetles and praying mantis that help control harmful garden pests. But remember, your hotel can only support as much as the surrounding environment supplies, so make sure to site near nectar-rich native wildflowers, berry shrubs, and water sources.

Certain insects (like solitary bees) need sun and warmth to survive, while others enjoy cooler, wet conditions. Site your hotel in a spot that gets both sun and shade as well as protection from chilly winter winds. Our hotel is located on a west facing wall amidst a new pollinator garden, just behind our herb and edible flower beds. There's plenty of food for the bees, and having the hotel close by will support a community of beneficial insects to help control our garden pests. It is, of course, possible that some undesirable bugs may take up residence too, but remember - you need a small population of bad guys as fodder for the good ones. Nature usually does a good job of maintaining equilibrium as long as you stick with natural, selective herbicides and pesticides. To create mini-habitats within the hotel, scavenge your garden for natural materials:

Holes drilled into wood blocks and hollow bamboo poles or plant stems support solitary bee populations. Include different diameters for different species.

Stones, bricks, roof tiles, and PVC tubes make handy houses for amphibians and arachnids. Stones and tiles placed in the frost-free center create a "toad hole" for overwintering amphibians.

Dry leaves, hay, straw, pinecones, and sticks provide habitat for a wide range of invertebrates, including lady beetles.



Nectar-rich plants provide food for honey bees and solitary bees. Surround your hotel with herbs, native wildflowers, and berry shrubs.

Rolled cardboard inside a waterproof container (like a soda bottle) is great for lacewing nesting.

Bare dirt and upside-down plant pots lightly stuffed with garden debris are perfect nesting sites for bumble bees.

Chunks of dead wood and bark sustain centipedes, wood lice, beetle larvae, and fungi.

Pallets make great building blocks for the structure of a hotel. They are freely accessible from most local businesses, and - bonus - you can feel accomplished about recycling. Just make sure they are marked "HT" for heat treated - as opposed to "PT," pressure treated. You can also use **logs, cinder blocks, and custom-built wooden structures**, as long as they haven't come into contact with harmful chemicals. You are limited only by your imagination.

INSECT HOTELS ATTRACT ALL KINDS OF LIVING ORGANISMS, CONTRIBUTING TO A DIVERSE, HEALTHY GARDEN COMMUNITY – PLUS IT'S A FUN PROJECT FOR CHILDREN (AND ADULT NERDS)!