
SUNNYSIDE THYMES

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“Helping Others Grow”

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Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?

SMG Education Committee

As any gardener knows, our gardens offer a tasty buffet to a wide variety of 'guests' – from the gluttonous pest that eats everything in sight to the polite nibbler; from crop pests to their natural enemies, the beneficial predatory insects who are dining on them. The challenge is learning to recognize both the good garden bugs and the pests so that we can welcome the former to the banquets of our gardens.

In this new series of monthly articles brought to you by the Education Committee, we will look at both pests and beneficial insects that you may encounter feeding in your garden. If you have a specific insect that you would like us to feature, please contact Lesa Smith at smithlesa@yahoo.com or another member of the Education Committee.

Wheel Bug

Measuring up to 1½ inches in length, adult wheel bugs (*Arilus cristatus* L.) are one of the largest true bugs in North America and are members of a group of bugs known as assassin bugs. Normally dark brown to gray, it gets its common name from a cog-like wheel emerging from the top of the thorax of the adult. It has membranous wings that in flight produce a noisy buzzing sound and long front legs that it uses to seize and hold its prey.

Wheel bugs feed by piercing and injecting a potent saliva into their prey. Wheel bug saliva contains enzymes that quickly subdues the prey and digests its internal tissues. The wheel bug then sucks this digested liquid from its prey.



Considered beneficial insects, wheel bugs feed voraciously on caterpillars such as the fall webworm and the imported cabbageworm. They have been reported to feed on Japanese beetles, eleven-spotted cucumber beetles, leafmining beetle larvae inside the leaf, moths and other soft-bodied insects. Additionally, wheel bug nymphs feed on aphids and other small insects. Female wheel bugs have been known to kill and feed on male wheel bugs after mating.

Wheel bugs are not aggressive and will try to avoid conflict. However, if handled carelessly, wheel bugs may inflict a painful bite on people. Such a bite has been described as "much more powerful than a hornet or wasp sting". Injury from a wheel bug bite takes about 10 days to heal and leaves a small scar.
