

Nature Friendly Garden

Contributed by Webmaster
Sunday, 04 November 2007
Last Updated Monday, 05 November 2007

Lauren Smith: What is your book about? Marlene A. Condon: My book explains why the nature-friendly gardener does not face the perennial problems encountered by the typical gardener. Most gardeners try to garden in spite of "Mother Nature" instead of working with her. "She" is your greatest ally! Lauren Smith: Why did you write this book? Marlene A. Condon: I wrote this book to help gardeners to enjoy gardening as I have always been able to do. I have never had to deal with the problems that other gardeners are always complaining about. Lauren Smith: Do you think a garden can really co-exist with "garden predators"? Marlene A. Condon: I know that a garden can coexist with predators because I have decades of experience with this. There are definite steps that people can take to keep wildlife from helping themselves to the food or flowers that one grows.

Lauren Smith: What are some quick tips you can share with gardeners looking to create a more balanced garden? Marlene A. Condon: Gardeners need to create as many kinds of habitats as possible to entice a variety of critters to live in the yard and garden in order to encourage natural predator/prey relationships. (a) Grow three levels of plants (flowers and native--not lawn--grasses, small shrubs and trees, tall shrubs and trees) to create a more naturally landscaped yard. (b) An area of moss should be in the yard so fireflies can lay their eggs here. Firefly larvae are the best controls for slugs and snails which only bother growing plants if they are overpopulating the yard. The preferred food of slugs and snails is decaying plant and animal matter which they recycle for the benefit of your plants. (c) Bird houses can be put up to entice insect-eating birds to live in the yard to limit insect and spider populations. Lauren Smith: Is there anything that gardeners should *never* do in their yards? Marlene A. Condon: (a) Gardeners should never kill snakes as they are your best control for rodents. Snakes are the only animals with the anatomy to follow rodents into their burrows. (b) Gardeners should allow the natural system of checks and balances to work. This means they should not be doing the killing by using pesticides which also harm the animals gardeners need to provide this service. In a naturally functioning yard, no animal is a "pest" because it performs a function to help keep everything balanced. Thus (c) gardeners should never kill unidentified creatures. (d) Plants should not be deadheaded but instead allowed to go through their natural cycle and they should be left standing throughout the winter. This provides food (in the form of seeds and overwintering insects) to help wildlife to get through the harshest time of the year. Additionally, stalks may hold the eggs of natural predators that should not be destroyed. Lauren Smith: What other tips can you share? Marlene A. Condon: Brush piles should be made from the pruning of shrubs and trees to provide habitat; an artificial pond should be considered to help frogs and salamanders, etc. to reproduce so they can provide arthropod control in and away from the pond; and all plant matter should be recycled via a compost pile.