

# 5 HERO INSECTS THAT PROTECT VEGETABLE GARDENS

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*What I love about spring is the warmer weather, fresh smells and the bursts of greenery. More time is spent outdoors and if you are an avid gardener like me, you'll be relishing precious hours with your plants.*

*The only thing that bugs me though, is when my garden is under attack from nasty pests! I can write a book on pests, but this time I'm focusing on insects that prey on others. Not all insects are pests, and when it comes to my pride and joy, I need all the help I can get.*

Here is a list of 5 helpful insects that keep your garden safe from pests:

## 1. Robber fly



I know what you're thinking; how can flies be beneficial at all? Hear me out. These flies aren't the type that sit on your *shisanyama* when you're about to take a bite. Robber Flies are of the Order Diptera, and the Family Asilidae and are also referred to as "assassin flies" due to their violent predacious behaviour. These flies feed on various insects; such as other flies, ants, grasshoppers and even some spiders.

**Robber flies** are known to hide out in plants and attack their prey in flight when the opportunity presents itself. They then stab these unsuspecting insects with their proboscis and inject them with saliva containing paralysing enzymes that digest the insect's insides. The Robber Fly finishes with a grand finale by sucking the liquefied meal through their proboscis. How *gripping*.

This insect makes me think about the **assassin bug** that also enjoys its meal in liquid form... Though they are most welcome to protect my veggie patch!

## 2. The Parktown Prawn

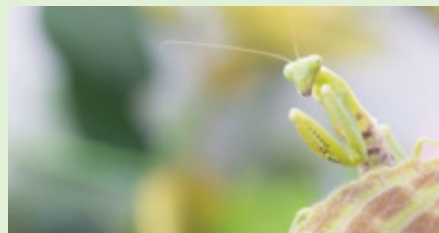


These giant insects are between 6-7cm's in size (in some cases even larger!) and are also known as the "king of the crickets", since they belong to the King Cricket family. They hail from Parktown, Johannesburg and are also one of the most feared insects around. **Parktown Prawns**

(*Libanasidus vittatus*) are frightening-looking creatures that would even make a grown man run for cover. I can testify to that, but I shan't be naming and shaming.

The inspiration behind adding this insect to the garden hero list is one of our blog readers – Ashleigh – who mentioned that these insects are a pesticide-free way to control snail and slug populations in Johannesburg gardens. Parkies definitely make it to the list, since I have been removing countless snails from my spinach plant (named "pop-eye"), so they are definitely invited to guard pop-eye from the slimy garden slayers.

## 3. Praying Mantis



This is my favourite insect, not only because it feeds on flies, crickets and garden destroying grasshoppers, but also because they move so graciously. The **Praying Mantis** gets its name from the way they hold their front legs as if in prayer. But don't be fooled by this innocent pose. When prey is within reach it will extend its arms at rapid speed and quickly grab the insect.

The Praying Mantis is the only insect that can turn its head 180 degrees to survey their surroundings, and they are brilliant at camouflaging, blending in perfectly with your garden. Plus, the way that they rock back and forth make them look like a leaf in a light breeze. So clever and stealthy!

## 4. The Dragonfly



Dragonflies are able to intercept and grab prey mid-air (much like the Robber Fly), can move

in any direction and hover in one spot for more than a minute. Not only are these insects lightning fast, but with their compound eyes (which contain thirty thousand facets) they have **near 360-vision**. With this incredible eyesight, they can single out a target from a swarm of insects.

**Dragonflies** feed mainly on mosquitoes which definitely scores some brownie points in my book as their buzzing noises keep me from getting a good night's rest. On the flip side while female mosquitoes prefer a blood buffet, male mozzies prefer eating fruit. This is both advantageous for me and my strawberry and blueberry plants! They also feed on ants, gnats, flies, *muggies* and other flying insects.

## 5. The Lady Bug



Last- but not least- on the list is the **Lady Bug**. These insects come across cute and pretty with their polka dotted appearance, but don't let this fool you. Many farmers bring in lady bugs to protect their crops against aphid populations. Aphids are also a problem in our gardens too. These soft bodied insects are known to suck the juice from any plant they are feeding on. They can be problematic on vegetables like tomatoes, brinjals, peppers and beans.

Luckily for us, lady bugs are a sign of good luck since we know that they will kill off aphids and any other plant sapping lice that could ruin our vegetable garden. In fact, lady bugs can consume over five thousand aphids in their life time. I give the feisty lady bug a 10/10 for natural pest control!

**So, as you see not all insects are harmful and the above make a mean team in warding off pests!**

**The next time I see any of these good guys in my humble veggie patch I will give them a nod of approval for a job well done in protecting my precious garden!**