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Wait To Clean Up Your Yard

When we have nice weather during the midst of winter, we often feel tempted to go outside and get a jump start on our gardens by clearing brush and other dead vegetation from last summer. However, while we may feel ready to venture outside, the same is not true for all the critters in our yards and gardens.

Since we do not see insects buzzing around in the winter, you may assume they are all dead. In reality, many of these insects are hibernating, just like bears do in the winter. Some native bees nest down in the hollow stems of plants like coneflower and bee balm and would die if this vegetation is removed. Other bees are known to nest underground and would be disturbed by any raking or tilling. Underneath the leaf litter in your yard, there are likely lacewing eggs, butterfly, and moth larvae, and perhaps even a queen bumblebee seeking shelter. Leaf litter also attracts lady beetles, which will eat aphids in your garden in the summer.

While a garden full of debris might not look appealing to us, just know that all kinds of beneficial organisms are sleeping under the dead vegetation. By removing this vegetation or tilling the soil, we are killing the next generation of beneficial insects before they have the chance to emerge and contribute to a natural ecosystem.

When should you clean up your yard and garden? There are varying answers. You can track soil temperatures or air temperatures to try and estimate when insects may emerge. But the easiest way is to watch for insects. Look around and see if bees and butterflies are fluttering around. After you notice insects coming out from hiding, wait a few days and then start your clean up. If there are areas you do not plan on planting, you can always leave debris in place for future insects to nest in too.

By forgoing the pristine garden look for a more natural one, we can all work towards helping support these essential pollinators that play a significant role in our food chain.