



Photos by Ben Pfeiffer, founder of Firefly.org

"FIREFLIES OF TEXAS: GLOWING, GLOWING, GONE"!

By Ben Pfeiffer
Firefly.org

Gardeners often don't realize gardens make for great firefly habitat, helping to replace lost natural habitat. The common firefly -- the Big Dipper firefly (*Photinus pyralis*) -- readily takes to an organic habitat. The trick is to make your garden as inviting as possible for fireflies to take up residence.

Gardens are meccas for food fireflies eat. If you have fought off snails, slugs, various insects, worms then fireflies can lend a hand by helping to control these pests.

Fireflies spend up to 95% of their lives in larval stages. They live in soil/mud/leaf litter and spend from 1-2 years growing until finally pupating to become adults. This entire time they eat anything they can find. As adults, they only live 2-4 weeks. Females that have mated successfully need a place to lay eggs. They will lay eggs in many spots, but gardens offer an oasis with a source of soil moisture good for larval development. Some inventive tips for attracting fireflies:

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- Don't rake leaves and put them on the curb. You are raking up firefly larvae and throwing them away.
- Collect bags of leaves to make "Bag Compost". Collect 5-15 bags.
- Wet bags down in a shady lawn area. Keep moist/wet for 3-6 months or up to a year.
- Bags will attract snails/slugs. This is food for growing fireflies.
- In Spring, put bag compost in your garden. Put it in mounds and till it into your soil.
- Repeat each year. It might take as long as 5 years, or as quick as that same year, to get fireflies in your garden



L to r: firefly in larvae stage need to eat. Favorite food: snails and slugs.

Other ways to help attract fireflies:

- Assess your soil health
- If you have poor soil, introduce nutrients such as bag compost, leaves.
- Till your soil. Tilling adds some aeration and prevents soil from compacting.
- Avoid use of broad spectrum pesticides, especially lawn chemicals.
- Turn off outside lights and advocate for local "Dark Skies" policies to control light pollution.
- Buy land to protect species.
- Let log and leaf litter accumulate. Segment an area of your land/yard to remain in a natural state.
- Plant trees and native grasses. Grasses and forbs help retain soil moisture.
- Don't over-mow your lawn.

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