

A Hands-off Approach to Mosquito Control

Article & photos submitted by Margaret Fisher

When Michael and Emily Kohler moved to the Wyckland area of Clifton ten years ago, they made the mistake of hiring an insecticide company to spray the mosquitoes that were bothering their toddler. Their house is uphill from a pond, and when they noticed insecticide residue on the pond surface and read about the “insect apocalypse,” they knew they had a problem. They cancelled the contract, were careful to dump standing water wherever possible, and added mosquito dunks to the water behind the pool cover. What resulted was actually a lot fewer mosquitoes than when they had been trying to control them chemically.

This result may seem counterintuitive but actually makes sense. Targeting adult mosquitoes by spraying is not the most effective control measure. Insecticides that kill adult mosquitoes also kill any other insect in the vicinity, which throws the ecosystem off balance. Dragonflies are not around to eat the mosquitoes, ladybugs to eat the aphids, or firefly larvae to eat the slugs. In general, the ecosystem falls apart. Humans may respond to this with even more chemical poisons, contributing to the appalling global reduction in numbers of most species of insects over the past few decades. As a familiar illustration, gone are the days when our windshields would be covered by bug splats on a summer’s drive. This might strike some as a plus at first glance, but not when you consider the songbirds, frogs, salamanders, etc, that depend on invertebrates in their diet.

The number one method for reducing mosquito populations is to eliminate standing water. It also helps to remove English Ivy, which makes a good breeding ground. If there is water that cannot be dumped, adding B.t. dunks or granules will kill the larvae of mosquitoes and related fly species without hurting most other insects.

In the Kohler’s case, their pond is not a breeding ground because the water is moving and because the fish eat any larvae that are there. Turtles make their home there as well, and they even once spotted an otter. Since stopping the insecticides, the firefly population in their yard has soared, looking like stars in the trees. Michael and Emily have been working to

enhance the habitat by removing invasive plants and adding natives.

For more mosquito control methods that are safe for humans and wildlife alike, see the Wild About Clifton website. www.wildaboutclifton.org/natural-mosquito-control

Right: Red-footed Cannibal Fly



Above: Spotted Pink Lady Beetle



Above: Common Eastern Firefly



Left: Spangled Skimmer Dragonfly

DIANA & BELLACK
WWW.DIANABELLACKPHOTOGRAPHY.COM

WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHY & PORTRAITS | VA/DC/MD & WORLDWIDE
dianabellackphotography@gmail.com