

Dragonflies by Gayla Aspenleiter

If you own a pond, chances are you have dragonflies. But the question is, are they friend or foe? To begin we must understand the three stages of a dragonfly – the egg, the nymph, and the adult dragonfly. The male and female dragonfly will mate while flying in the air. The female will then deposit her eggs on a plant in the water or if she can't find a suitable plant, will deposit the eggs directly into the water.

Once the dragonfly eggs hatch, the life cycle of a dragonfly larva begins as a nymph. The nymph will live in the water until it grows and develops into a dragonfly. This cycle could take as long as four years. Nymphs are excellent swimmers and will eat insects (mosquito larvae), smaller nymphs, tadpoles and small fish as they develop. Occasionally, the nymph will venture out of the water to get a quick snack from the land.

Once the nymph is fully grown, and if the weather is right, it will complete the metamorphosis into a dragonfly by crawling out of the water up the stem of a plant. The nymph will shed its skin onto the stem of the plant. The



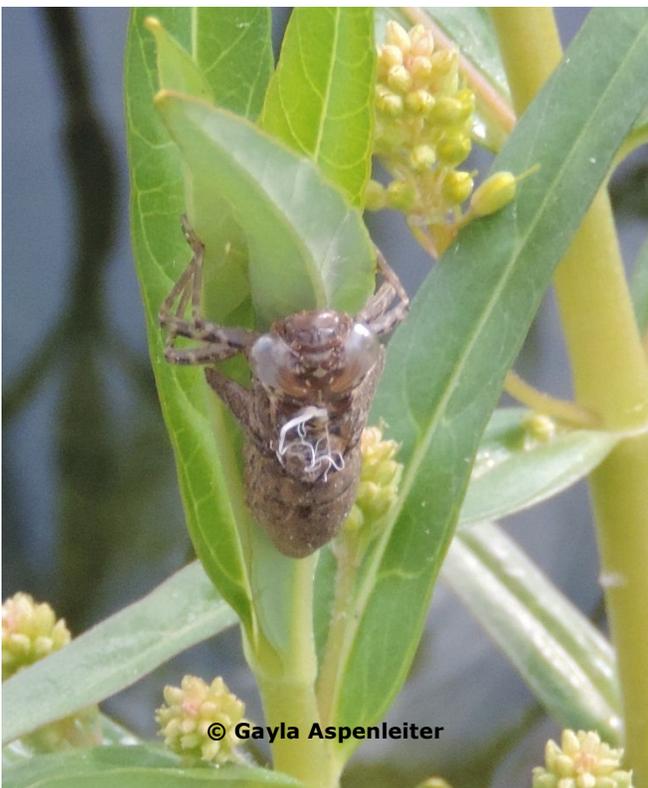
Dragonfly image from Wikipedia Commons

newly hatched adult will have to wait several hours before its wings dry out and it becomes strong enough to fly. The dragonfly at this stage is called a teneral which is a Latin word meaning tender, soft, or delicate. This very critical period in the life cycle of the dragonfly makes them weak and they cannot fly very well. This makes them vulnerable to predators such as birds, lizards, frogs, and fish. The skin that the nymph leaves behind is called the exuvia. Usually it will be stuck to the stem of a plant for a long time after the dragonfly has left it.

The newly emerged dragonfly with its exceptional eye sight and fast and agile flight movements will immediately hunt for food and begin to look for a mate. An adult dragonfly devours gnats, mayflies, flies, gnats, mosquitoes, ants, termites and other small flying insects. They sometimes eat bees, moths and butterflies. Very few insects can escape its basket-shaped grabbing limbs before being crushed and swallowed.

Once the dragonfly finds a mate, the female will find a body of calm water that will be a good place to lay her eggs, and the life cycle of the dragonfly begins all over again. Adult dragonflies only live about two months.

In conclusion, dragonflies are your friend. They take care of the pesky mosquitos, gnats and flies in your yard and they are fun to watch and beneficial to your pond.



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Exuvia