

## Kids Ask Dr. Bug

Home to more than plants, kids ask Dr. Tamra Reall about the curious things found in the garden.

**Nov 2018**

**Question:** Do ladybugs really eat the “bad bugs”? Anna, 13

**Answer:** Ladybugs eat aphids, small insects that suck plant juices and can spread diseases to other plants. Baby ladybugs, called larvae, look like tiny black and red alligators and eat aphids, too. Ladybugs also eat other soft-bodied critters such as mites, whiteflies, and scale insects.

**Question:** Can butterflies bite me? Gavian, 10

**Answer:** No, they can't bite you. Butterflies and moths have a long tube, called a proboscis, to suck nectar out of flowers. The proboscis is soft and won't hurt you. When not eating, the proboscis is curled up under their head. Some moths don't even have mouthparts as adults.

**Question:** Are centipedes insects? Emmanuel, 10

**Answer:** Adult insects have an exoskeleton, 6 legs, 3 body segments, 2 compound eyes, a pair of antennae, and most have 4 wings. Centipedes have many body segments and 1 pair of legs per segment, ranging from 30-50 legs, except for one group with about 350 legs. Interestingly, centipedes never have 100 legs. Centipedes are not insects, they are chilopods. Millipedes, another chilopod, have 2 pairs of legs per segment.

**Question:** Are insects dangerous? Emily, 9

**Answer:** Some are, but most are helpful or neutral, meaning they neither help nor hurt. Many beetles, bees, flies, true bugs, and butterflies pollinate our plants giving us a variety of food to eat and plants to enjoy. Remember insects are wild animals—yes, insects are animals. It's usually best to enjoy them from a distance and not to touch them to avoid bites or stings.

Some insects are indeed dangerous, such as mosquitoes. Mosquitoes can carry diseases like malaria and West Nile Virus. Ticks (which are arthropods, not insects) can give you Lyme disease. Make sure you empty containers of water around your house after it rains to keep mosquitoes from laying eggs and wear protective sprays or gear when you play in grassy or wooded areas.

**Question:** Are bees and wasps the same? Isela, 9

**Answer:** Bees are kind of like the little sister of the wasp family and so are very similar to wasps. However, they eat different types of food. Wasps, such as yellowjackets and hornets are predatory, meaning they seek out prey for food. Wasps get a bad reputation for being aggressive, but they eat many insects and spiders, so they are still helpful as well as beautiful.

Bees are pollinators, collecting nectar and pollen for food. One species, honey bees, even make food for us—honey! You may know about bumble bees too, but did you know there are around 20,000 species of bees? Some live in colonies, but most do not. Some bees don't even have stingers.

Image: Monarch by Tamra Reall

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