

Kids Ask Dr. Bug

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

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Why do leaves change colors? Sarah 7

During the summer, leaves are green because of chlorophyll used to capture the sun's energy. Another pigment group, carotenoids (like carrots), create yellow and orange. These colors are there all summer too, but we only see them when there isn't as much chlorophyll. In the fall, if conditions are just right, leaves start making red pigments (called anthocyanins) that help the tree get all the energy from leaves before falling off.

How do insects get into your house? Bri, 8

Just like you, insects want protection from bad weather. In the fall, you might find ladybugs, stink bugs, and flies come into your house through cracks and holes. Spiders come looking for insects to eat, too. It's okay to shoo the critters back outside or vacuum them up.

Do roaches bite? Ramiyah, 8

Yuck alert: Only read if you really want to know! They don't usually bite people, but skin shed and frass (a.k.a. bug poop) can get in the air and cause allergy and asthma symptoms. This is a good reason to keep your room clean and help your parents clean up after dinner. Often chemicals have to be used to control this pest. Your parents can call your local county extension for more information.

How can you get rid of bedbugs? Damian, 15

The best way is never to get them in the first place. Until a few years ago, most people had never seen a bed bug. Unfortunately, bed bugs have made a comeback and are ninja-like hitchhikers and hide-and-seek masters. If you stay in a hotel, leave your things in the bathroom until your parents inspect the room. If you get bedbugs in your home, don't panic. They won't give you a disease, but their bites can be itchy. Hire an exterminator to get rid of this pest.

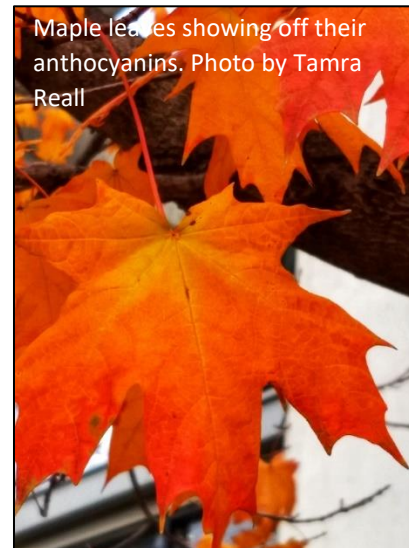
Does the moon affect insects? Jonathon, 9

Yes! Did you see the solar eclipse last summer? MU scientists, with the help of kids like you, learned that honey bees stopped moving when the moon blocked the sun. Some insects use the moon to navigate at night. One group of insects, called dung beetles, has even been found to use the Milky Way to navigate their dung ball away from the fresh pile of manure to raise a family.

How do you know so much about bugs? Jasee, 6

I have always been fascinated by insects. Although they are small, many are gorgeous and have fascinating lives and behaviors. I'm an entomologist - a person who studies insects. Scientists research insects to learn how to manage pest insects and how to help beneficial insects. Insects are also used in research to learn more about how cells, proteins, and genes work in other animals.

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Maple leaves showing off their anthocyanins. Photo by Tamra Reall