

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 flies exist? Ki, 14

As annoying as some flies are, flies are an essential part of our ecosystem. There are over 110,000 species of flies, from mosquitoes to the common house fly, to flies that help pollinate chocolate-producing cocoa trees. Some flies are important decomposers, and others hunt pests. Some are terrific mimics and look just like bumble bees.



A bee mimic fly. Image By Sjonnoh

How do flies walk upside-down? Soren, 12

Flies have feet with just the right amount of stickiness so they don't get stuck. They also have a pair of claws on each foot that help "unstick" their feet as they walk up walls or hang from the ceiling.

How do plants survive when it's so cold? Karen, 13

Plants aren't like animals, so they don't feel the cold like we do. However, they have to protect themselves from freezing because ice crystals can destroy their cells. Some plants grow from seed every year and some plants die back to their roots and regrow each year. Other plants go dormant in the winter, meaning they mostly stop growing. The roots may continue to grow because the soil can be a little warmer. Deciduous plants drop their leaves each year protecting the tree from damage while evergreens have a waxy coating that protects their leaves. Plants, even trees, benefit from being healthy and watered throughout the growing season before they go into winter.

Why aren't there as many insects when it's cold? Joanie, 7

We don't see many insects when it's really cold, but they are there. Insects have many strategies to survive winter. Some insects, like Monarchs, migrate to warmer places. Other insects hibernate in leaf litter or other protected areas, maybe even in your house! Some insects replace the water in their bodies with a type of antifreeze called glycerol. Dragonfly, damselfly, and mayfly nymphs actively eat and grow all winter long in the water, even under the ice. Honey bees stay close together in their hive and keep each other warm.

What is the best kind of houseplant to have as a pet? Mika, 7

Fun question, Mika! While houseplants won't jump onto your lap, plants are fun to raise indoors. There are many types to choose from, and the kind you get depends on where you will put it. Some plants like a lot of sunlight and other plants can grow less light. Some of my favorites are spider plants, Chinese evergreens, and African violets. Just make sure you keep your plant pet out of the reach of your little brothers.

If a bug bites me, will I get superhero powers? Josiah, 6

While obtaining superhero powers would be an excellent New Year's resolution, I don't recommend trying to get them through insect or spider bites. You'll be better off studying hard in school, eating healthy, and doing lots of push-ups.

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