

## Kids Ask Dr. Bug

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

Feb 2019

### Why do moths eat clothes?

**Nia, 10**

It's actually hungry caterpillars causing those pesky holes! The caterpillars come from eggs that certain moth species lay on fabrics appearing to be a good food source for their babies. Not all clothes are as tasty as others. Insects eating clothes usually go for natural fibers, such as animal (wool, leather, fur, feathers, and silk) or plant-based clothes (cotton and linen), or food that was left on the clothes. Other insects eating clothes include dermestid beetles, crickets, roaches, firebrats, and silverfish. You can protect your clothes by making sure they are clean when you put them away and keeping your room clean.

### Why are some leaves heart-shaped?

**Brydn, 9**

Plant leaves have two primary jobs: capturing sunlight and "breathing." Photosynthesis creates the food plants need to survive using sunlight and air. Plants "breathe" carbon dioxide (and some oxygen) through holes in the leaves, called stomata, as part of this process. Size and shape of leaves are influenced by how much light a plant needs. Most plants with heart-shaped leaves are naturally found in shady environments, such as beneath tall trees, so the wide leaf allows for capturing as much sunlight as possible.

### Are there any insects that come out when it's cold?

**Ethan, 9**

You won't find many active insects when the temperature is below 50 °F ...with a few notable exceptions! A handful of insect species have antifreeze proteins that prevent ice crystals from forming in their bodies. Some examples of these fascinating insects are called snow fleas (which are actually springtails, not fleas) and snow flies (a wingless crane fly).

### Where did all the bugs go? I saw a news article that said insects are disappearing.

**Christian, 17**

Recently, scientists learned that vast amounts of insects in the world are disappearing at an alarming rate. Lack of habitat and increased pesticide use are two reasons this is happening. Because there are many pest insects that we are still trying to manage and some insect populations that are growing, some may think this is something to celebrate. However, understanding how important insects are to the environment and our well-being shows that this is a dangerous situation. Insects pollinate plants, control other pests, recycle nutrients from dead plants and animals, and are a food source to many animals.

### Do any plants have flowers in the winter?

**Andrew, 5**

I was recently at the Anita B. Gorman Conservation Discovery Center and saw a witch hazel plant in full bloom. It's shaggy, spidery yellow flowers were on display for winter visitors. Hellebore is another winter blooming plant that comes up when everything else seems to be frozen. Pansies are surprisingly hardy despite their delicate appearance and can be planted in the fall and last all winter.



*Image: Witch hazel blossoms by Tamra Reall*

Tamra Reall (@MUExtBugNGarden) is a Field Specialist in Horticulture for the University of Missouri – Urban West Region. For free, research-based gardening tips, call 816-833TREE (8733), email [Mggkc.hotline@gmail.com](mailto:Mggkc.hotline@gmail.com), or visit [www.extension2.missouri.edu](http://www.extension2.missouri.edu). The University of Missouri is an equal opportunity/access/affirmative action/pro-disabled and veteran employer.