

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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A big part of science is collaboration and this month I worked with other entomology experts to answer your questions.

Why do mosquitoes lay their eggs in water? Soren, 12

What an excellent question! Mama mosquitoes deposit their eggs in water because their babies need it to survive. Baby mosquitoes, also called larvae, are aquatic and cannot survive on dry land. Only adult mosquitoes live outside of water. ~Samantha Daniel

Many insects lay their eggs where the larvae (immature insects) will have food. Larval mosquitoes live in water and breathe air using siphon tubes. Most mosquitoes lay their eggs on the surface of the water either singly or in batches. But some lay them on damp surfaces where water will later cause them to hatch. ~Jennifer Henke @JenniferAHenke



Image: Fluorescing emperor scorpion by Rosa Pineda CC-BY-SA-3.0

Why do scorpions glow in the dark? Thomas, 12

Scorpions are among some of the COOLEST arthropods ever! A UV light can really make those scorpions glow and help you find them if they happen to be wandering around your home. ~Faith Oi

Scientists don't know why scorpions fluoresce, meaning, they glow when UV light shines on them. Some hypotheses include helping them find each other, confusing their prey, and protecting them from sunlight. Are you the future scientist who will figure it out? ~Tamra Reall @MUExtBugNGarden

Is it okay to touch a butterfly? Olivia, 9

You can, but sometimes it makes it hard to fly because scales can be lost. Also, just like you wouldn't like to be touched by a stranger, it's hard to know what a butterfly prefers. So maybe we should leave them be until we figure out how to ask permission. ~Gwen Pearson @bug_gwen

Butterflies are so beautiful and it's very tempting to want to touch them. But doing so could be hazardous to their health! Butterflies have many fine scales covering their wings. In fact, their scientific name "Lepidoptera" means "scaly wings." The problem with touching them is that some of those scales may come off and affect their ability to fly. It's probably best just to take a photo! ~Sandy DeBano

What do butterflies eat? Aliyah, 8

Perhaps you've seen a butterfly crawling on a flower. What are they doing? They are slurping up a sugary drink! Butterflies don't have teeth to chew, but they have a long straw-like mouth to suck up liquid. Imagine all the things you could eat with just a straw for a mouth. For butterflies, they are drinking nectar from flowers. This gives them the energy to keep flying around and looking beautiful! ~ Grant Bolton @LGrantBolton

Butterflies drink nectar from flowers when they are adults, but when they are larvae (caterpillars) they eat the plants. In that case, they may even be pests. A famous example is the Monarch butterfly that feeds on the milkweed nectar when an adult, but eats the plant leaves when a caterpillar. ~Emilie Demard @DemardEmilie



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