

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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What kinds of bugs are in my backyard? Martin, 6

So. Many. Different. Insects! Honey bees, ants, beetles, mosquitoes, praying mantises, hover flies, wasps, squash bugs, flea beetles, bumble bees, stink bugs, green lacewings, brown lacewings, dragonflies, damselflies, springtails, scale, aphids, . . . I could go on and on. There are millions of different species of insects, and many of those can be found in your yard. Quick facts: How many of the insects listed are true bugs? Two (squash bugs and stink bugs)! Guess how many of those insects listed are dangerous? One (mosquitoes), maybe 3 (honey bees and wasps), if you are allergic to their venom. Most insects are beneficial, including the honey bees and wasps.

If I plant a tomato, will it grow into a plant? Isela, 9

Under the right circumstances, yes! The seeds in tomatoes are fully developed. However, the gel around the seeds has a chemical that keeps the seeds from germinating. This gel inhibitor helps the seeds wait until the fruit is eaten and moved away from the mother plant so it has a better chance at surviving. However, you can open the tomato and put it in well-drained soil. Keep the soil moist and warm. Tomato plants may emerge in about 2 weeks. Try growing seedlings from an heirloom tomato from a farmers market!

Do insects have homes? Tani, 7

Yes and no. Some insects have a home they constructed, like bees in a beehive. Other insects make their own home and carry it with them – bagworms and caddisfly larvae are good examples. Organisms that live with ants in their colonies are called myrmecophiles. Some insects live inside other insects, and many of these are what we call beneficials because they kill insects that harm our plants. Many other insects just rest in a protected spot when they need to, such as the underside of a leaf.

Is it true that if you cut a worm in half, you get two worms? Steve, 13

No, that will kill the worm. If a worm loses its tail, however, it can grow a new one. If the tail gets damaged, another one can grow and you might end up with a two-tailed worm! It would be hard to move in the soil with two tails, though. Did you know that worms don't have teeth? They have a crop and gizzard, like birds, and need sand or grit in the gizzard to grind up the food. Earthworms help decompose dead plant and animal materials in the soil. Bacteria and fungi growing on the decomposing organic matter are what provide nutrition to worms.



Earthworm in a grassy field. Image: Tamra Reall

Dr. Bug's springtime reminder: Spring rain leaves puddles where mosquitoes lay eggs. Empty any standing water in your yard. Remember to look for buckets, old tires, tire swings, gutters, etc. More places to lay eggs means more mosquitoes and more mosquito bites. Long sleeves and repellent are important to reduce the risk of mosquito-borne diseases.

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