

## Kids Ask Dr. Bug

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

### **What is this?** (see picture) Jared, 9

This many-legged creature is a house centipede. Like other centipedes, this arthropod has one leg per body segment and has a voracious appetite for insects in and around your house. Its legs are longer than many other centipedes so it looks a little more intimidating. However, it is a critter you want to have around, so let it do its job. If you get a chance to look at it up close, note the bright colors on its back.



### **How do insects know who is nice?** Madison, 9

Insects spend their lives trying to survive. Like us, they want food, shelter and safety. They do this very differently than you and I, however. Instead of figuring out who they can trust, they act instinctively to gather food and to find places to build their nest or resting spot. Those who live in colonies, such as ants and honey bees, have developed ways to keep out those who do not belong there. They recognize their nestmates by smell and feel, and will attack anyone else who tries to enter. Insects do not understand your intentions – that you are just curious and want to see what they are doing. If you are careful, you can observe insects without them noticing. However, even if you unintentionally disturb an insect and they feel threatened, you might receive a warning bite or sting.

### **Why do bees sting and how do they do it?** Jaedon, 10

If a bee feels threatened, or that its colony is threatened, it may attack. Female bees have a couple of ways to defend themselves – biting and stinging. Male bees can only bite. This is because the stinger is a modified ovipositor, the body part that lays eggs for many insects. Most bees have a smooth stinger that allows them to sting more than once, if needed. Honey bees have a barbed stinger that gets stuck in our skin and stays attached, along with the venom sac, as the bee flies away. This is why it is important to gently flick the stinger off of you if you get stung, with your fingernail or a card, to reduce the amount of venom that gets released. If you get stung, watch for signs of an allergic reaction. You may need to take an antihistamine. Some people are severely allergic to bee stings and may need to go to the hospital.

### **Why does a bee die after it stings?** Valerie, 10

As mentioned in the last answer, after a honey bee stings, it loses its stinger and venom sac. While the bee can fly away initially, the loss of the body part causes the bee to die. Remember that bees don't sting to be mean. They sting because they feel threatened. They lose their life when they are defending their colony so they are not looking for an opportunity to sting anyone. I love watching bees work as they gather pollen from flowers. I find that if I carefully walk in areas with bees, they just fly around me if I'm in the way.

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