

## Kids Ask Dr. Bug

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

### **Are there more ants or butterflies in the world?** Brianna, 9

Ants! By Far! Ants are considered the most numerous insect in the world. Although there are about 17,500 species of butterflies in the world (~70 species in Missouri) and “only” about 15,000 known species of ants, ants live in colonies and these colonies can be incredibly large! It is estimated that there could be 10,000 trillion to a quadrillion (a million trillion = 1,000,000,000,000,000) ants with whom we share this earth. Ants live on every continent, except Antarctica, but they have been to outer space as part of an experiment. Additionally, new ant species are still being discovered, sometimes even in a scientist’s own backyard. And here’s another interesting fact: until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it’s very possible that the combined weight of all the ants was more than the combined weight of all the humans on earth.

### **How long do insects live?** Logan, 9

The answer to this question really depends on the insect species. Some insects, such as fruit flies, complete their life cycle in a little more than a month. Many other insects complete their life cycle in 1-2 years. Some examples of insects that go from egg to adult in 1-2 years include many butterflies, moths, wasps, dragonflies, mayflies, mantises, walking sticks, and ladybugs. In contrast, termite queens and kings, and ant queens, can live for decades. One scientist noted an ant queen lived 28 years in their lab. Another long-lived insect is the periodical cicada. It spends most of its life underground as a nymph, and arises *en masse* with its siblings and cousins every 13 or 17 years, depending on the brood. The next time this mass cicada emergence happens in Missouri will be in 2024.

### **What do insects eat?** Matthew, 10

Again, it depends on the species. Herbivores are plant-eating insects, and predators are insects that eat other animals, such as insects, spiders, and crustaceans. Some insects are parasites and they feed on other animals but don’t kill them. Some insects are generalists and eat anything they come across. Other insects are specialists and will only eat one type of food.

### **Why are ladybugs called ladybugs?** David, 9

Ladybugs have a few names today: ladybugs, lady beetles, ladybirds, and ladybird beetles. Of course, the various species of these insects have scientific names and are within the family Coccinellidae. As there are both males and females of this insect, there is an intriguing story behind the name. This beetle is an important beneficial insect that eats small insect pests that can kill crops. Because of this beneficial nature, as well as the bright red outer wings that are similar to the red cloak Mary (also known as Our Lady) often wore in early paintings, ancient farmers named this beetle “Beetle of Our Lady”, which was shortened to what we call it today.



Do you have questions for Dr. Bug? Send them to [ReallT@Missouri.edu](mailto:ReallT@Missouri.edu). Please include your name and age.

Tamra Reall (@MUExtBugNGarden) is a horticulture specialist for MU Extension – 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 [extension2.missouri.edu](http://extension2.missouri.edu). The University of Missouri is an equal opportunity/access/affirmative action/pro-disabled and veteran employer.