

## Kids Ask Dr. Bug

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

### Why do insects have six legs? Owen, 7

Insects have six legs because it works for them! Not all insects use their legs the same way – some hop, some walk and run, and some dig. Some legs on each kind of insect are used in different ways, too. A grasshopper's hind legs are the powerhouse for hopping, but they use the other two sets of legs for balance and grooming. A mole cricket's forelegs are built for digging and the hind legs help push the soil out and push the insect through the excavated tunnel. Something else interesting about the mole cricket's legs - its ears are on its front legs! For some insects that walk and run, such as ground beetles, they move in an interesting pattern. They lift two legs on one side while using two legs on the other side – three legs are always on the ground at a time, like a tripod. This is a very stable position and allows the insects to crawl over rough ground very quickly!

### I heard we need to save the bugs. I don't like bugs. Why do we need to save them? Samantha, 9

Insects are an incredibly important part of our environment. Most insects help us, some insects are interesting but neutral, and only a few are pests. Here are a few ways insects help us:

- Pollinating flowers so we have delicious food to eat
- Recycling nutrients from dead plants, dead animals, and poop
- Eating pest insects
- Being food for other animals (including humans!)
- Giving us ideas for new technologies

Consider learning more about insects so you will appreciate them more. You can do this by taking a class with 4-H, reading books, and watching videos about insects. Without insects, our world would be in trouble. We now have fewer insects, especially beneficial insects, because of the loss of insect habitat (food and places to live). You can help by planting flowers, leaving the flower stems up over the winter into late spring, and not using insecticides whenever possible.



*Monarch caterpillar by Tamra Reall*

### What are the easiest bugs to catch? Blaine, 9

Some of the easy insects and multi-legged critters to catch are caterpillars, millipedes, and roly polys. However, be careful of hairy caterpillars! Just because they are easy to catch doesn't mean they are safe. The hairs on caterpillars could be itchy or cause blisters. And, just because they may be easy to catch, doesn't mean they are easy to find! It's usually best to look, but not touch. Many critters hide in crevices, under rocks, in logs, in the soil, or their bodies are colored in a way that makes them look like the plants they live on. If you find them (and if you hold them), remember to put them back and gently replace the rocks or logs.

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Some insects will come to you, such as mosquitoes and horse flies! Granted, even if they land on you doesn't mean that they are easy to catch. Insects that feed on people are very adept at being able to avoid being caught so they don't get swatted or killed.

**Message from Dr. Bug:** While we're talking about mosquitoes, this is a good time to remind you to avoid mosquito bites. Wear long sleeves and pants outside, and/or wear insect repellent. Even better, avoid giving mosquitoes a place to live in your yard – empty containers of standing water, including toys in the yard, tire swings, yard ornaments, and gutters, especially after a rainstorm.

While most insects are beneficial, mosquitoes are not beneficial to humans and our health. Do you know what is the most dangerous animal on earth? That's right, mosquitoes! Check out this video for more information (scan QR code or type: <https://youtu.be/HZFMlBTYGSQ>)



Do you have questions for Dr. Bug? Send them to [ReallT@Missouri.edu](mailto:ReallT@Missouri.edu). Please include your name and age. To help me learn what you learn from this column, please consider filling out this survey: [bit.ly/KidsAskDrBugSurvey](https://bit.ly/KidsAskDrBugSurvey)

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