

Bug Hunt

Overview: Visit your garden or a nearby green space and search for insects and other small animals for a bit of outdoor fun!

Materials:

- hand lenses (optional)
- paper, pencil and clipboard or garden journal (optional)
- camera or phone (optional)

Approximate Time to Complete: 15+ minutes

Location: Outdoor

Ages: Prek – 2nd Grade

Season: Spring - Fall



Instructions

1. Gardens and green spaces are teeming with life. Although it is the larger animals that might first catch our eye, when you go on a hunt to specifically search out insects, they will not disappoint. You can find them flying through the air, chomping on your plants and hiding under rocks — just to name a few of their favorite locations.

There are over one million known species of insects in our world, making up nearly 75% of the animal kingdom. Unfortunately, we often give insects a bad rap by focusing on those we consider pests, but the vast majority of insects are not harmful, and actually, they play unseen but important roles in our ecosystem. Our gardens also contain many other small inhabitants from the animal kingdom that are not classified as true insects, such as spiders, earthworms and pill bugs that you may find on your search. By definition, insects have 6 legs, 3 body parts (head, abdomen and thorax) and most have wings.

So, put on your safari hats and head out to your garden or a local greenspace with your young gardener to embark your bug hunt. You do not need any supplies at all, but it can be fun to have a hand lens to get a close up look at the smaller insects and animals, a garden journal or paper to record your findings, and/or a camera or phone to catch a few pictures.

2. Begin your search looking for flying insects such as butterflies, bees and dragonflies. How many can you find? Watch the different ways they move through the air. Estimate how fast do you think they move? Why do you think they need to move fast?

3. Next take a close-up look in and around the plants. Look for signs that insects or other small animals may be present such as holes in leaves and spider webs. Don't forget to look underneath leaves and inside flowers with closed petals, such as snapdragons. Are the insects solitary or found in a

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group? Do they look like they are hurting the plant? Do any of their characteristics (such as color or shape) help them stay hidden?

4. Finally, get down on your hands and knees and explore life down in the soil. Turn over rocks, look under mulch, check the area around puddles. Many insects enjoy the comfort of shade and also like to hide from predators. How many do you see? What happens when you uncover them? What do you think they eat?

5. This activity can take as little as 5 minutes or as long as an hour depending on the attention and interest of your young gardener. Let their enthusiasm be your guide. When you finish your hunt, debrief by looking at your garden journal notes or photos. Ask, which animals were insects? Which creature was the smallest? Which was the largest? The fastest? The slowest? The best hider? Did you have a favorite?

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