

MSU Science Zone

No.
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What are insects?

Insects are living creatures that have three pairs of legs and three body regions – head, thorax (middle), abdomen (rear). They also usually have mouths on the outside of their bodies and antennae. Insects don't have skeletons like we do. Instead they have hard shells on the outside of their bodies called exoskeletons.

People often think of insects as pests, but they do lots of useful things. Insects can help plants grow and they help plants and animals decompose. Insects are an important source of food for all kinds of animals and even

some people. Certain kinds of insects make silk and honey, and can be used as medicines or fishing bait. They can even help solve crimes by giving scientists information about where and when a crime happened. Insects can be harmful to humans too, like eating vegetables and wooden buildings, and spreading diseases.

Scientists at Montana State University (MSU) are researching insects for many reasons. For example, studying insects can help us grow better crops, learn how some diseases spread, and tell us more about climate change.

Try this!

Make an insect journal

Find some paper or a note book to turn into your insect journal. If the weather is warm outside you can go on an insect safari, or if the weather is cold you can look around inside. If you need to look for insects inside, you might want to keep your journal over several days or weeks and keep track of the critters you come across. Each time you find an insect, draw a sketch of it and write down what it is doing. Also write down where you found it and if it was with any other insects. If you know the name of the insect, write it down. If not, find an adult and ask them to help you identify it. After you have found a few insects, see if any patterns emerge. Are insects usually alone or in groups? Are there places that they seem to go more than others? Do they like areas with lots of light or darkness? Ask an adult to help you find more information at the library or online about the insects you find the most.

Did you know?

Of all the living animals on our planet about 8 out of every 10 are insects.



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