KPOV – *The Point*

Gardening: Get Good at It

“Bug” Trivia

June 15, 2021

It has long been known that some 900 thousand different kinds of insects live in our world. At any time, it is estimated that there are some 10 quintillion individual insects alive (that’s a 10 with 18 zeros). With so many sharing the world with us, how much do you know about them?

The largest numbers in the U.S. fall into four **insect Orders**: Coleoptera (beetles) at 23,700, Diptera (flies) at 19,600, Hymenoptera (ants, bees, wasps) at 17,500, and Lepidoptera (moths and butterflies) at 11,500.

Certain **social insects** nest in large numbers depending on various factors. 630,000 ants were estimated in a Jamaican nest. Locust swarms are said to hold up to one billion insects! East African termite queens can lay an egg every two seconds or 43,000 eggs a day. One pair of houseflies, if they all survived a five-month season, could have 190 quintillion descendants.

To protect its eggs from wandering ants, a **lacewing fly** drops a thread from its abdomen onto a leaf. This thread hardens into a stalk and the insect mother deposits a single egg on top. Often, stalks will twine together which keeps the eggs off the surface of the leaf.

Trees and plants can develop small bumps. These “**galls**” can be caused by bacteria, viruses, molds, mites, or round worms. But a great many are caused by insects — beetles, moths, aphids, thrips, flies, and wasps who put their eggs in the plant or tree. The resulting bump provides protection and food for the developing creature within.

**Spiders** have six pairs of glands, each of which independently spins silk threads through tiny bumps on the spider's abdomen. Although all the glands produce silk, the silk from each pair differs.

Certain solitary **wasps** build their nests of mud or earth, or in tunnels bored in wood. They lay their eggs and stock their nests with another insect, paralyzed by their sting. When the eggs hatch, the infant larvae feed off the fresh insect food.

**Yellow jacket** nests are either ground nests, usually in a hole previously used by a small animal, or aerial nests in a shrub, hanging from the eaves, or in a wall void. If the nest is in a wall, don't close the opening - yellow jackets can chew through wall board and plywood and you don't know if they will go indoors or out. At the end of the year, old nests are permanently abandoned.

**Flies** are easily distinguished from other insects because they have only one pair of wings: the front wings.

**Family Syrphidae (syrphid, hover and flower flies)** closely resemble bees and wasps and are often mistaken for them but they don’t sting. These “flower flies” hover around flowers and feed on nectar and pollen.

**Family Drosophilidae (fruit flies)** are small, less than 3/16-inch long and are usually found around decaying fruit. The larvae feed on yeasts growing in the decayed vegetation. One species in this group, Drosophila melanogaster, has been used extensively in studies of genetics because of its short life span and ease of rearing.

**Family Tachinidae (tachinid flies)** are beneficial as parasites on other insects, parasitizing the larvae of sawflies or beetles. Eggs are laid on the body of their host and, when hatched, the larvae burrow into the host and eat the internal organs. Tachinid flies are usually as large or larger than house flies and for the most part appear hairy.

For information on insects and many other gardening topics, call the Master Gardeners at 541-548-6088 or visit our website: gocomga.com and click on the KPOV tab on the orange bar. This has been Gardening: Get Good at It on KPOV’s The Point.

Resources:

<https://extension.oregonstate.edu/collection/critter-corner>

Bug Trivia [<https://extension.oregonstate.edu/pests-diseases/insects/bug-trivia>

<https://extension.oregonstate.edu/gardening/pollinators/yellow-jackets>

Numbers of Insects (Species and Individuals) <https://www.si.edu/spotlight/buginfo/bugnos>