

How to be a garden minibeast detective

Invertebrates or 'minibeasts' are fascinating to look for and watch. Whether they crawl, creep or buzz you can find many different species in any sized garden; under flowerpots, stones, fallen leaves, log piles or maybe hiding in the corner of a window.

Here are some fun activity ideas, using everyday recyclable materials, to attract and provide new homes for our incredibly important invertebrate friends. Why are they so important? [answers below].

Old fruits - your breakfast grapefruit or orange is a tasty snack and excellent bait to attract minibeasts. Place the eaten, hollowed out halves outside on the ground. I peg mine down with string and wooden pegs to stop birds and mice from turning them over. Fruit bag netting works well too. Remember to put two short sticks, the thickness of a thumb, under the fruit - your guests need a way in! Check during the day and night - which visitors are nocturnal or diurnal (daytime)? Try leaving different rotting fruit or vegetables inside - are different guests attracted?



Bottle traps - carefully cut a plastic drink bottle in half (Elmer and Paddington class are experts at this) and push the cut off top inside to make a funnel. Place your bait in the bottom of the bottle; apple and banana are perfect. Then hang from a tree branch or hedgerow. Check each day for your minibeast visitors and then release carefully. Why can't they escape without your help? Clue: funnel

New homes - collect bundles of dry and hollow plant stems and simply tie together or cut the bottom and top off small plastic bottles and push through bundles of dried twigs - well done, you've made a cosy house for earwigs, woodlice, ladybirds and some species of spiders. Hang your new home in a bush or against a garden fence. An old terracotta pot stuffed with dry straw and turned upside down on a stick also makes a cosy shelter - place amongst long grass or a flowerbed.



Collecting tips:

- Used yogurt pots make perfect collecting pots - use one for invertebrates 'with legs' and one for 'no legs'. Centipedes don't like getting their legs stuck together with slug slime! Use a spoon to carefully collect so you don't damage delicate legs or bodies.
- Different minibeasts live in different habitats. Put a white tea towel or pillowcase on the ground under a low tree branch or bush and gently shake. Which creatures drop out to meet you?
- Remember to care for and return your invertebrate friends where you found them.

Top spring spots: Now the weather is getting warmer look out for:

Ladybirds, bumblebees and butterflies - brimstone, peacock and red admiral will be reappearing after their long winter sleep (hibernation).

Have fun nature detectives and I look forward to hearing all about your discoveries! You could make your own 'spotter list' or take photos.

Mrs Mitchell

Answers: *bees and butterflies help pollinate plants; woodlice, earthworms, slugs and snails are decomposers and help recycle nutrients in dead matter; they are part of the food chain and are eaten by birds and many other creatures.*