

Step down into the world of minibeasts and discover the miniature marvels on your doorstep. The shape, size, colours and movement of bugs are fascinating to children and perfect for inspiring imaginative play. As well as promoting descriptive language and storytelling, talking about bugs will extend children’s understanding of the natural world.

Buzzwords

The bug stones are beautifully visual and tactile, providing sensory feedback as children feel with their fingers the same details they observe with their eyes. There’s plenty to examine and discuss:



- Bugs love to hide! You could place the bug stones in a basket of leaves, sticks and pine cones, or in some long grass, soil or compost, ready for children to uncover.
- Ask questions about the bugs to develop children’s thinking, descriptive vocabulary and observation skills. Can you find a bug with spots? Can you find a bug with blue on it? Which bugs have wings? Which have legs – and how many? Which is your favourite, and why?
- Do the children recognise any of these bugs? What are they called? Have they seen any of them outside? How big were they?
- Do the children know any books or stories about bugs? Let them be the experts and share their prior knowledge.



- As they compare the bugs, encourage children to sort them by various characteristics. Do they have wings or no wings? Dots or no dots? Do they have green on them or only other colours?
- Which body parts can the children find? Can they see heads, eyes, antennae, legs, wings or shells? You might like to introduce the words ‘thorax’ and ‘abdomen’.
- Do any of these bugs change shape – what will happen to the caterpillar?
- Where might these bugs live? On the ground, in a tree, on a web, in a hive, in a nest or near some flowers? Do they live by themselves or with other bugs? Do they try to hide by being the same colour as their surroundings – are they camouflaged?
- Have a closer look at the leaf bug – why do you think it has this name? Why might it be helpful for it to look just like a leaf? Look at the rainbow shield bug together – why do you think it has this name?

- Talk about the different ways that bugs move – which of them fly, jump, crawl, glide or hang on a thread?
- What do these bugs like to eat – other bugs, plants, fruit, nectar/pollen or dead things?
- Which other animals might like to eat these bugs?
- Do any of these bugs make a noise – what do they sound like?

Bug safari

- Search for some real bugs outside – a sun hat, clipboard and magnifying glass will help children feel like real bug experts. One way to find lots of bugs is to put a sheet under a small tree or bush, then gently shake it. You might be surprised at how many bugs fall onto the sheet!
- What bugs can the children spot? Do any of them look like the bug stones? Are they similar? To help record their discoveries, children could place the stones in a tray showing bugs they've found. You could also provide clipboards, digital sketchpads or chalk boards for children to draw them.
- Use magnifiers to help children see the beautiful details on both real bugs and the bug stones. This requires spatial awareness and good motor skills, so practise using one with the children.



- Some bugs can be carefully handled, but others should only be looked at. You might like to talk about how delicate some bugs are, such as a butterfly, or how others can sting.
- To remember which bugs they saw, children can impress the stones into dough. Using the underside of the stones to make an imprint will also help them to see the detail there.
- Why not encourage more bug life in your outdoor area by creating a simple bug hotel? Fill large cardboard tubes with natural materials such as leaves, moss or pine cones, and place them in a sheltered spot. Allowing an area of grass to grow long and planting wildflowers will also create a welcome environment for various minibeasts.
- As you think about where bugs like to live, discuss how they are affected by pollution and changes in the landscape and climate. Why is it important to look after minibeasts? What other animals need them in order to survive?

Arthropod adventures

The bug stones are ideal for open-ended small-world play indoors and out:

- Create a small world for minibeasts with plenty of nooks and crannies for the bugs to hide in. This could be in a large tray covered in green or brown fabric, dyed rice, dry leaves, shredded brown paper, sand or natural-coloured kinetic sand. Add natural features such as sticks, attractive pieces of wood, pebbles, moss, straw, log slices, fir cones, acorns, real or artificial plants, or Yellow Door's Hollow Log, Tree Stump or Forest Play Scenery Stones. You might like to feature a bug hotel, such as the Bug Hotel 10-Frame with a variety of natural materials inside the compartments to keep the bugs cosy.





- Take the small world play outdoors, creating the bug habitat in a sand tray, on a grassy area, in a tray filled with soil or even in a natural area that already has bug-friendly features such as mud, bushes, plants and leaves.
- Use your mud kitchen as an insect investigation station by adding a suitable work surface (such as a large tray or log slice), insect tubes, magnifiers, leaves, flowers and clipboards.

Books about bugs

Mad About Minibeasts by Giles Andreae

Norman the Slug with a Silly Shell by Sue Hendra

Peep Inside: Bug Homes by Anna Milbourne

Aaaarrgghh, Spider! by Lydia Monks

Songs about bugs

Incy Wincy Spider

There's a Tiny Caterpillar on a Leaf

The Ants Go Marching One by One

Little Miss Muffet

Get talking – useful words

Insect, spider, shell, wing, leg, antennae, head, thorax, abdomen, habitat, web, hive, nest, nectar, pollen, camouflage, fly, jump, crawl, glide, hang.

