

NATURE DETECTIVE

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HOW DO INSECTS CHOOSE WHICH FLOWER TO VISIT?

Insects go to flowers in search of their food, nectar and pollen: but how do insects choose which flower to go to? They are attracted to flowers by their bright colours and smells. In these experiments, you can be a nature detective and test how colours and scents attract different insects.

COLOUR EXPERIMENT

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

- Cardboard • Poster paints
- Scissors or box-cutter (get your parents to help you)
- Nature Notebook for recording your observations

WHAT TO DO:

1. Make 7 cardboard squares, 30cm X 30cm, and paint them different colours: white, yellow, red, blue, green, purple and black.
2. Let them dry completely.
3. Lay the card squares on the grass on a warm sunny day and watch to see which insects come!

Which are the most popular colours? Do you notice any flowers nearby with the same colours?

SCENT EXPERIMENT

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

- Colour cards from the first experiment
- Honey and other scents you want to try
- Nature Notebook

WHAT TO DO:

Insects are also attracted by scent. Pick the least visited card from the colour experiment, and add on a smear of honey or another scent you think may attract insects. See if insects will now visit this colour card, attracted by smell. Record your observations in your nature notebook. Which are the most popular colours? Do you notice any flowers nearby with the same colours?

TO THINK ABOUT AND WONDER:

Scientists think that one out of every three bites of food we eat is made possible because of the help of insects and other animal pollinators! How does pollination work? While gathering their food, pollinators (like insects, butterflies, bees and moths) rub up against a flower's reproductive parts leaving behind pollen it has picked up from a different flower. The plant then uses this pollen to make a fruit or seed. Many species of plants could not produce their fruit or seed without the help of animal pollinators bringing pollen from a different flower. How do you think the shape of a flower might help a plant share its pollen with others?

The Exploration Club for Families... NatureKids BC helps children get outdoors to play, imagine and explore in nearby nature. Join a family nature club near you or become a free-range member. Find out more at: www.naturekidsbc.ca. If you are already a member you can use this activity as part of your Action Awards Quest!

