



Use a pitfall trap to catch bugs

Find and study fascinating minibeasts that live in your area.

Summer is a great time to try trapping and studying insects and other minibeasts because the warmer weather makes them more active. You can catch insects without harming them in a pitfall trap. This is just a container buried in the ground. Creatures fall into it and stay trapped but unharmed until you set them free (unless they can fly). It is best to leave the trap overnight because lots of insects are active after dark. If you set it up during the day, make sure to check it every few hours. This activity is also best in dry weather because if it rains and your trap fills with water, any creatures inside could drown.

A pitfall trap is easy to make. All you need is a clean container such as a plastic cup or yoghurt pot; a garden trowel for digging; and a tray for studying what you find. Make sure you ask an adult before you use these items and check where you can set your trap. If you haven't got access to a garden you'll need to find a spot where you have permission to dig. Wash your hands thoroughly after handling soil.

MEET THE FAMILY
Woodlice are crustaceans, not insects, and are related to crabs and shrimps.



Get ready to study bugs close up.



Find a location and dig a hole

Choose a location on flat ground, in the shade and near plants. A trap at the bottom of a slope could easily fill with water that runs down it, and you don't want your insects to overheat in the sun. Setting it near plants, such as in a flower bed or under a tree, will ensure more insect traffic. Use your trowel to dig a hole big enough for the pot to be buried up to the rim. Have it next to you to check size and depth as you dig.

Place your trap

Put the pot in the hole and fill in the empty space around it with soil. If you get a little earth in the bottom that's ok. You can also add a few leaves to it so that insects can hide. Make sure that the top of the pot is level with the ground. If the rim sticks up even a millimetre, it won't work. If it might rain, place four stones at the trap corners and balance a piece of wood or tile on them to protect the entrance.



Collect and study your bugs

To see what creatures have wandered into your trap, pull it out and carefully tip the contents into a tray or large container with high sides. You can use a stick to gently move leaves. To identify what you have, use a book or ask an adult if you can photograph them and look them up online. You can record what you found in a notebook, along with the date and location. You could also try drawing your minibeasts.

Release and try again

Once you've recorded your finds, release anything you catch in a safe, sheltered spot. You're most likely to see beetles, centipedes, earwigs, spiders and woodlice, though if you can get dung from a plant-eating animal, such as a rabbit, you might attract one of the UK's many types of dung beetle. If you want to try again, just re-bury your pot and if you don't get many bugs at first, try a new spot.



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