



Minibeasts are otherwise known as Invertebrates because they have no backbone. Instead their hard parts are on the outsides of their bodies. This is called an exoskeleton.

A lot of our invertebrate species are in trouble because their habitats are being destroyed but gardens can be a great place for minibeasts to live. See how many different ones you can spot in your garden and how you can make your garden a welcoming place for them.

Gather Your Equipment

You don't need any specialist equipment to look for minibeasts but a magnifying glass is very useful. It is also useful to have a light coloured plastic tray or box and maybe a small tub to hold them while you take a closer look. You can also get collecting pots with a magnifying glass built into the lid.



Where to look

Remember that minibeasts are small and they often like to hide from larger predators who might like to eat them. Different types of animals can be found in different places.

1. Close to the soil

There are lots of little tiny creatures living in the soil that help to keep it healthy. Woodlice, millipedes, earthworms and many types of beetles are decomposers. This means they eat rotting plant material and help to turn it back to soil. Ants tunnel and bring air to the roots of plants helping them to grow. Lifting up stones, wood or other objects lying on the soil can be a great way of getting a close up look. Just remember to replace them after you take a look.



Black Garden Ants



Woodlouse

2. Living on Leaves

Many creatures live on the leaves of trees and bushes. Bugs are insects that have specially adapted mouthparts for sucking juices from the leaves. Caterpillars munch on leaves and lots of flying insects rest on them. Many insects such as shieldbugs lay their eggs on leaves. Spiders will build webs or lie in wait for prey. Look closely at leaves or gently shake branches into a tray to see what you can find. Nettles and ivy are really good plants for wildlife.



Moth Caterpillar



Shieldbug Eggs



Green Shieldbug

3. Long Grass

If you have long grass, listen out for the song of grasshoppers. Lots of types of moths and butterflies also like long grass.

Common Blue Butterfly



Grasshopper



Baby Spiders in a Protective Web



4. Feeding on Flowers

Bees, hoverflies, butterflies and wasps are pollinators. They feed on the nectar and pollen from flowers and as they do this, they bring pollen from flower to flower helping the plants to produce seeds. Most of our fruits and vegetables depend on insects for pollination. Letting wildflowers such as dandelions and clover grow in your grass by reducing mowing and planting fruits, vegetables and herbs can all help pollinators.

Hoverfly



Red Admiral Butterfly



Cinnabar Moth Caterpillars



Solitary Bee



Identifying Minibeasts

Use our minibeast hunt sheet to help get you started with finding some of the main groups of minibeasts in your garden. If you want to learn more, you can get books on minibeast identification. Laois County Council have produced a lovely book on Gardening for Biodiversity which is widely available from County Councils and can be downloaded online.

Useful Websites

- biodiversityireland.ie – has lots of information on recording wildlife and sells beautiful identification swatches
- pollinators.ie – the website of the All Ireland Pollinator Plan has information for schools, gardeners, farmers etc on helping pollinators and has downloadable posters of Irish bees and butterflies
- heritageinschools.ie – lots of useful videos and resources



Orange Tip Butterfly Egg

COVID-19: It is important to stay up to date as social distancing guidelines may change over time. The most up to date advice, information and resources can be found on: www.hse.ie and www.health.gov.ie

Nature on Your Doorstep challenge sheet brought to you by Carlow Sports Partnership in collaboration with Wildways Adventures