

25,000 Bugs Could Be Living In Your Holiday Tree

(December 2017)

For many people, getting a holiday tree is one of the best parts of the yuletide season. You can make a fun family trip to the local tree farm or tree lot. Then you might spend an impressive amount of time trimming the tree just right so you can admire it all month long—maybe longer. And of course, your home will have a fresh pine scent. Sure, holiday trees seem all magical—until you find out that sitting within those perfect green boughs are up to 25,000 insects and arachnids.

That’s right. A freshly cut holiday tree can have thousands of insects lurking within it. There are aphids, spiders, mites, beetles, and praying mantises. Not exactly the holiday guests you were hoping for? Don’t worry; they won’t hurt you. Actually, most of them are microscopic, so you won’t even see them. The bigger varieties will typically stay on the tree, while some will make a daring escape to a window or light fixture. Other than that, they won’t do any harm to you or your abode. Now, let’s take a closer look at your new, but temporary, roommates.

First on the list of holiday tree occupants is the aphid. Some aphids look like spiders and ticks, but they only have six

tiny legs and won't hurt you in any way. They tend to be inactive and dine on parts of the tree.

Bark beetles are next. No, they don't bark; they just like to make small holes in trees. Don't worry, though—they won't make holes in your wood furniture. They prefer the freshness of a newly-cut holiday tree.

Mites are all over holiday trees, but they're not as bad as they sound. They are usually in a tree because a bird's nest used to be in the tree. Mites will mostly stay put and eat other insects and eggs they find amongst the branches.

Believe it or not, you might spot a praying mantis living in your holiday tree. Mantises are predators through and through, so they'll kill and eat the other bugs in your tree. Other insects of notable mention are psocids, scale insects, and spiders. Psocids are brown or gray in color and are happy eating mold, pollen, fungus, and other bugs in the tree. Anyway, psocids won't last long in your home. It's just too warm for them. Likewise, spiders won't live long in your toasty, cozy home, so you don't even have to give them a second thought.

Some people think the 25,000 number is way out of line and your holiday tree probably won't have enough bugs on it for you to even notice. However, if you want to take some preventative measures, you can shake your tree, or use organic insect control powder or spray on it before you bring it home, or just leave the insects alone. They'll likely die out in a short

time anyway. One thing is for certain, you're sure to enjoy the holiday season, no matter who your visitors are.

Teacher Resources – Vocabulary

Potential Words for Further Study: These words not only help with comprehension of the passage, they also appear more frequently in a wide spectrum of reading, especially in academic text. Therefore, further study of the meaning of these words may be beneficial. The words on this list can be incorporated into subsequent lessons.

create (v) to cause to come into existence; bring into being; make; originate; especially, to make or design (something requiring art, skill, invention, etc.)

occupant (n) a person, thing, etc., holding a position or place

temporary (adj) lasting, enjoyed, used, etc. for a time only; not permanent

Words for Quick Discussion: These words may need to be discussed with students as they are encountered, to help with comprehension of the passage. It is best to do this with a quick discussion while reading the text, in student-friendly language.

abode (n) a place where one lives or stays; home; residence

bough (n) a large branch of a tree

fungus (n) a plant that has no flowers, leaves, or green coloring, such as a mushroom or a toadstool. Other types of fungus, such as mold, are extremely small and look like a fine powder.

mantis (n) any of an order (Mantodea) of slender, elongated insects that feed on other insects and grasp their prey with stout, spiny forelegs often held up together as if praying

predator (n) an animal that kills and eats other animals

Definition Source: Collins English Dictionary. Retrieved from <http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english>

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1. Visit the Coh-Metrix Text Easability Assessor website at <http://tea.cohmetrix.com/>. If you do not already have a login and password, create one. It is free and easy to sign up for access to the website.
2. Once you have created an account and sign in, you will be taken to a page with an empty, white text box. Copy and paste the text from this passage into the empty, white text box. Make sure you are only copying and pasting the body of the passage. Do not include the title, date, or any of the resources present in the passage.
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