

Many children are fascinated by insects and bugs – and they only need to step outside to find them. The garden bug rollers are great for building on children's interest, and increasing their knowledge and understanding of the natural world. The rollers allow children to create detailed tactile patterns and pictures, whilst developing the fine motor skills vital for early mark making and writing.

Bugs on a roll

Children will enjoy trying out the rollers independently, but guiding them through the early stages will help them get to grips with them:

- The easiest way to use a roller is to roll it away from you – creating a long playdough scene or pattern. Afterwards, if a scene is facing sideways, simply turn the piece of playdough round so the scene faces the child. They can then use the stamp at the end of the roller to complete the picture.
- The next step is learning to roll across the body. As well as encouraging children to apply equal pressure laterally, this action will challenge them to cross the midline and develop motor skills important for learning to write.
- Talk about how hard the child has to press down with the roller to make the design come out well. What happens to the picture when they press harder or more gently?
- What does the picture feel like when they run their finger over it?
- Explore using the rollers with different substrates, such as clay, kinetic sand, sand dough or cloud dough. This will encourage children to adapt their rolling technique, pressing harder when necessary and developing their motor skills.
- Provide the rollers and dough on a suitable surface for children to explore independently. You might like to offer them on an outdoor table where children could be visited by real bugs.



Bug talk

As children use the rollers, talk about the different bugs:

- What is the bug's body like? Talk about its shape, how many legs it has (is it an insect?) and if it has wings.
- How does the bug move? Does it crawl, jump, fly or hang on a thread?
- Where does it live? Have you seen one before? How can we look after where it lives?
- What do you think the bug likes to eat? Is there another animal that might try and eat it?
- Talk about the repeating patterns you can see in the rolled dough. What shapes can the children spot – circles, lines or hexagons? You might like to offer small hexagons cut out of paper, mirroring the honeycomb pattern, for children to experiment with tessellation.
- Have fun matching bug figures or pictures to the rolled designs.



- How many bees are on the honeycomb? Can you add a ladybird to each flower?
- Encourage children to make up simple stories about the bugs they roll – what are their names, where do they live and what are they doing?

Explore more

Encourage creativity and exploration by adding in other materials:

- The rolled patterns are ideal for adding natural and easily available materials, such as flowers, cut grass, leaves or pebbles. You could even add golden blobs of honey, using chickpeas painted gold.



- Create a small world garden. As well as dough and the rollers, add bug figures, flowers (real or artificial), leaves and even a bug hotel. Yellow Door's Ladybird Counting Stones, Honey Bee Number Stones and Butterfly Sensory Play Stones are ideal.
- Use the rollers and dough as part of a bug explorers table, alongside bug figures, notebooks, magnifying glasses, close-up images of bugs, books, and real flowers, honeycomb or jars of honey.
- Look for real bugs outside. Magnifying glasses are ideal for examining tiny creatures in detail, such as spotting features like antennae or counting the number of legs. Children might be lucky enough to see pollen on a bee's legs or a spider with an egg sac. To help children see the detail in a spider's web, try holding a sheet of black paper behind it.



- Be inspired to create some bug art. You could make honeycomb using painted bubble wrap and add bees made from pipe cleaners or paper. Alternatively, print off a picture of flowers and grass, then print red ladybirds using a potato or round sponge, adding fingerprints with black paint for the head and dots.

Songs about bugs

Incy wincy spider

There's a tiny caterpillar on a leaf

Little Miss Muffet

There's a worm at the bottom of the garden

Listen to 'The Flight of the Bumblebee' by Rimsky-Korsakov

Books about bugs

Aaaarrgghh, Spider! by Lydia Monks

My Butterfly Bouquet by Nicola Davies

A Good Place by Lucy Cousins

The Big Book Of Bugs by Yuval Zommer



Get talking – useful words

Wing, leg, antennae, flutter, nectar, honey, honeycomb, hexagon, hive, buzz, web, thread, weave, delicate, beetle, shell, hard, crawl, nibble, jump, leap.