

# The Great Cover-Up

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One of the things I like about gardening is the chance to see lots of different insects when I'm outside. Insects are very interesting, so I think we'll be talking about them a lot this winter in Kid's Corner.

What kinds of insects did you see last summer? I bet you saw butterflies, yellow jackets, and ladybugs. They're easy to see because they're so colorful. Can you think of any reason an insect would want to be easy to see? Usually, that means an insect tastes bad, is poisonous, or has a sting. Its bright color serves as a warning to predators that it isn't good to eat. Predators are critters that eat other critters. In Minnesota, birds are predators that eat lots of insects. Sometimes insects have bright colors because they want birds to think they're bad to eat, even if they aren't. For example, orange and black Monarch butterflies are toxic, but Viceroy butterflies, which are also orange and black, are not toxic. Birds won't eat either kind of butterfly because they can't tell the difference.

I think the most interesting kinds of insects are the ones you don't see. Many insects use camouflage to hide from predators. They are the same color as the plants they live on or near. Have you ever walked outside and been surprised when a grasshopper suddenly jumped in front of you? You were surprised because you didn't see the grasshopper first and you didn't see it because it was the same green as the grass and plants in your yard. In that way, a grasshopper can go about its business (eating plants) without being seen and eaten by a hungry robin.

For our camouflage activity, you're going to make some insects to hide in your home. You'll need paper, crayons, scissors and tape. Trace the insect outlines with this article onto some paper. You can draw your own if you like. Look around and see how many colors you see in your home and color your insects to match. Cut them out and place them on the matching objects. Then, invite your family and friends to find them all.

Go to <http://www.extension.umn.edu/county/Dakota/news/InsectTemplates.pdf> for insect templates.