

Bug Man

By Virgene Link

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Skagit County entomologist shares love of insects in new book.

Who can explain the subtle differences of cell configuration within the wing of a wasp? Or the reasons that, while all bugs are insects, not all insects can be called bugs?

Just ask Skagit County's resident entomologist, Lloyd Eighme of Lyman. He can answer many such questions, with knowledge gained from his lifelong experience in entomology (study of insects) and as a professor of biology for 30 years.

Eighme also recently completed a book focusing on local insects. "Insects of Skagit County" is a fascinating, accessible guide to identifying and understanding the many tiny critters we see in our gardens and fields.

The book is well illustrated with photographs to help identify beneficial insects, such as the larvae of lady beetles (aka ladybugs), or less desirable insects such as the asparagus beetle, whose name reflects its diet.



Lloyd Eighme of Lyman is an entomologist, whose insect collection is utilized by the Skagit County Master Gardener Program. Eighme recently completed a book about local insects called "Insects of Skagit County." Photo by Valerie Dekok.

The loosely bound volume can be purchased at the Skagit County Extension office or at the next Washington State University Know and Grow workshop on October 13.

Always interested in nature, Eighme grew up near Granite Falls. He asked his parents for help identifying the array of crawling, flying and wriggling insects he found in his explorations. When they didn't know the answers, they suggested he ask his teachers.

Eighme went beyond simply asking; he "absorbed" a series of nature books in his junior high school homeroom.

By the time he went to high school, Eighme had created an insect collection — and developed a reputation as a budding expert. His teachers even turned to him for answers to any questions about insects.

And even before his formal teacher training, Eighme enjoyed sharing his knowledge. He taught high school and college biology, then earned a doctorate in entomology at Oregon State University.

The OSU entomology department's research collection contained more than a million different specimens. From this array of insects, Eighme began to focus on the many varieties of wasps.

Later in his career, Eighme discovered a new species of predatory wasp called Pulveero, which means "digging in the dirt." This wasp literally digs a chamber in the ground where it lays an egg and feeds its young with aphids. This is good news; anything that eats aphids is a gardener's friend.

For more than 30 years, Eighme taught biology and entomology at Pacific Union College in northern California. The nearby wilderness became his classroom, where he taught students to collect specimens and study the complex roles insects play in the ecosystem. The retired doctor continues to generously share his knowledge with Skagit County's Master Gardeners. He also was honored in 2007 as Skagit County's Master Gardener of the Year.

The insects featured in his book are part of the vast insect collection he has created, which is housed at the Skagit County Extension office in Burlington. Gardeners are welcome to view the collection by appointment.

Virgene Link is a Master Gardener and an assistant curator of the insect collection at the WSU Skagit County Extension office, 11768 Westar Lane, Suite A, Burlington, WA 98233. 360-428-4270.

Meet the Bug Man and his insects

What: Meet 'Bug Man' Lloyd Eighme of Lyman and learn about some local insects at this Master Gardener WSU Know & Grow Workshop.

When: Tuesday, October 13th at 1 p.m.

Where: WSU Northwestern Washington Research and Extension Center's auditorium, 16650 State Route 536, west of Mount Vernon

More information:

Admission is free. Direct any questions to the WSU Skagit County Extension office at 360-428-4270, ext. 0.

Some beneficial insects

Meet some of the helpful bugs that are working in your garden, even in the fall:

HOVERFLY - Their black and yellow coloring make hoverflies, aka syrphid or flower flies, look something like bees. However, they have no stingers and are friendly. They "hover" and can fly like a helicopter.

LADYBUG - Lady beetle (aka ladybug) larvae look kind of like alligators and consume more aphids than the adult.



Left: Hoverflies look similar to bees with their black-and-yellow coloration. They like flowers too. **Center:** A Bow-area ladybug. Lady beetles (aka ladybugs) are beneficial insects that help control aphids and other harmful insects in gardens. **Right:** A ladybug larvae rests on the leaf of a flowering plum tree. Larvae look like tiny alligators and eat more aphids than adult ladybugs. Photos by Scott Terrell / Skagit Valley Herald.

ROVE BEETLE - Rove beetles are completely harmless, though they may raise their abdomen as if they had a “stinger.” They are recyclers of dead and decaying matter and also feed on insects found in decaying matter, such as maggots. They vary in size from 1 /8-inch to 1-inch long. Most are long, slender and colored black or brown.

DIODONTUS - A small, 1 /4 inch or smaller, predatory wasp that uses aphids or other insects to feed its young. It makes a tiny burrow in the ground for its eggs, so if you encounter one, please protect its space. Because of its size it can be confused with small flies or gnats.

BUMBLEBEE - Native bumblebees and ground-nesting bees continue to seek flowers in the fall. Few plants are blooming this time of year, so the bees appreciate plants like oregano and late-blooming flowers. Bumblebees are important pollinators, especially since so many honeybees are being decimated by mites and diseases. Through the winter, bumblebees hibernate under piles of dry grass, wood or leaves. As you’re cleaning up the garden, if you find a bumblebee under some brush, cover it up again, thank it for helping pollinate your garden, and wish it a good winter’s rest. an insect collection — and developed a reputation as a budding expert. His teachers even turned to him for answers to any questions about insects.

More info:

1. PNW bulletin #550 “Encouraging Beneficial Insects in Your Garden,” available at WSU Skagit Co. Extension Service or on line at <http://pubs.wsu>
2. “Beneficial Garden Insects,” Oregon State University Cooperative Extension Service <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/html/grow/grow/insects.html#anchor1159937>
3. In Spanish: “La Entomología Básica para Jardineros (Basic Entomology for Gardeners),” <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/pdf/ec/ec1545-s-e.pdf>