

## Praying Mantis

Look for this strange-looking humongous bug in the yard late summer. There are over 1800 species, mostly tropical. Three are native in North America: the Chinese mantis, *Tenodera sinensis*, the Carolina mantis, *Stagmomantis carolina* and the European mantis, *Mantis religiosa*. The mantis, also known as mantid is most closely related to grasshoppers and cockroaches. The common name comes from the manner in which they hold up the forepart of their body, with the front legs folded as if in prayer. They range from 2 to 6 inches in length and are varying shades of brown and green. It is uncanny how they camouflage themselves in the surrounding foliage. They can resemble leaves, sticks and even flowers. This helps hide them from their potential prey, as well as their enemies.

Mantids move rather slowly, swaying back and forth, mimicking foliage in the breeze. They can fly, but not long distances, preferring to move from one perch to another. Mantids tend to fly more at night which brings them to the attention of bats who see them as a source of food. Some mantids have actually learned to hear the sonar used by the bats to navigate and are able to stall their flight literally dropping out of sight of the bats' perception, thus escaping the meal they were intended to be. Other than bats, birds and spiders are their main predators.

The praying mantis is strictly a meat eater who enjoys moths, beetles, horseflies, leaf hoppers, aphids, and other mantises, even animals larger than themselves, such as frogs, lizards, and young snakes. They almost always start eating their prey while still alive and go for the neck to ensure struggling stops quickly.

There is but one generation per year. In the fall, females lay eggs in a large mass about one inch long (30–300 eggs), in a frothy gummy substance that glues them to tree twigs, plant stems and other objects. A few weeks after laying eggs, the mantis dies. The eggs overwinter and tiny nymphs emerge from the egg mass in the spring or early summer. Nymphs look similar to adults, only smaller and have no wings. They quickly grow eating each other until only a few remain and become one of our larger insects.

Praying mantis eggs cases are now available for purchase through catalogs, on-line, and at your local nurseries. You can raise your own prehistoric-looking bugs for cultural insect pest control.

## Sources

Lyon, William F. (1991) Ohio State University Extension Factsheet HYG-21154-02 [Praying Mantis The Care of Mantids](#)

Bragg, Phil E. *An Introduction to Rearing Praying Mantids*. 1997. ISBN 0 9531195 0 5

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