



2026-27 TEXAS UGLY BUG CONTEST

NATIONAL QUALIFYING COMPETITION

(Deadline Friday, **October 30, 2026**)

Rules and Instructions

The Microscopy Society of America (MSA) and the Texas Society for Microscopy (TSM) welcomes your participation in the first annual National Ugly Bug Contest. It is our hope that this educational outreach program will provide a fun and rewarding educational experience for your students.

Who Can Participate?

The 2026 National Ugly Bug Contest is open to all elementary schools, public or private. Elementary is defined as kindergarten through 6th grade. Only one (1) bug per school may be submitted. If multiple classrooms from the same school submit bugs, a run-off election will be held at the school site to select the entry.

What to do? (details for each step are included later in this document)

1. Collect bugs. Bugs must be collected locally in Texas. **Spiders, stinging (wasps, bees, horse flies etc.), scorpions, and endangered insects will NOT be accepted.**
2. Pick the ugliest or most unique "bug." Small insects make the best entries because photography is easier and the images are typically of better quality. See **Collecting Your Ugly Bug** section for more information.
3. Write a description of your ugly bug. See the **Description** section of the rules on the form.
4. Contact one of the TSM member laboratories listed below. Contestants must be **submitted by Friday, October 30, 2026**. Be sure to include the form attached to these rules. Bugs will not be entered into the contest without a completed form.
5. Vote on the **Ugly Bug** web site (<https://uglybugcontest.org/>) in January and February for the ugliest bug in Texas!
6. The winning ugly bug from Texas will move on to compete for the ugliest bug in the nation. Vote for **America's Ugliest Bug** in April.

Schedule

August-October 2026: Learn about insects and find your most interesting specimen.

October 30, 2026: Contact the TSM member lab listed below to arrange for pick-up or mailing. **No entries will be accepted after October 30th.** See the "Submit your Entry" section for more information.

November-December 2026: Bugs will be processed and photographed by the TSM member lab. Images will be uploaded on the web portal for viewing.

January-February 2027: Public voting will occur to select the **Ugliest Bug in Texas** on this website: <https://uglybugcontest.org/>

March 2027: The Ugliest Bug in Texas will be announced. Yee Haw!

April 2027: State and regional ugly bugs will advance to the National Ugly Bug Contest for another round of public voting. The National winner will be announced at the end of April.



Prizes

The winning entry from Texas will be awarded a **stereomicroscope with camera**, a slide kit, and educational materials. The national winning school will receive an additional National Ugliest Bug Award and an additional microscopy prize along with educational materials. National winners may be recognized at a Microscopy Society of America (MSA) event. Bugs entered in the contest will also be displayed on the internet at the Ugly Bug web site, <https://uglybugcontest.org/>. MSA considers the bugs in the contest to be submitted on behalf of the school; therefore, any prizes awarded belong to the school itself and not to the student who originally found the bug.

STEP 1 & 2: Collect Bugs and Pick the Ugliest!

FIRST RULE: NO ARACHNIDS--that means NO spiders or scorpions!

MSA is concerned about students' safety while they are collecting insects, so we will not accept poisonous bugs in the contest. All spiders and scorpions can be considered venomous.

Origin: Only **bugs native to Texas** will be accepted so that students are ensured of the opportunity of observing the bugs in their natural habitat. Exotic bugs that might have been obtained from collections are not in accordance with the educational spirit of the contest.

Size: SMALL BUGS ARE BETTER. The size of the bug's body is not as important as the size of its head, which should be 1/2 inch or less in diameter. Bugs with big heads are difficult to photograph in the scanning electron microscope (SEM). If the entire head cannot be photographed, the 'ugliest' part of the bug (a subjective opinion of the TSM member doing the photography) will be used for the contest.

Condition: The bug must be in good condition; i.e., not crushed, dirty, or partially eaten.

Packaging: Please submit a dead specimen whenever possible. A live specimen can be euthanized by placing it in a freezer for approximately 48 hours or dunking it in isopropyl (rubbing) alcohol. Soft-bodied specimens should be preserved in small amount of isopropyl (rubbing) alcohol. Place alcohol-preserved specimens in a tightly sealed, leakproof container, then place that container inside a second sealed bag or container with absorbent material. Please contact the TSM member laboratory if you have any questions regarding the preparation of your bug.

STEP 3: Description

All submissions must be accompanied by a description (approximately a paragraph, although you may do more if you'd like). The quality and accuracy of the description will be considered in the judging process and will be used to break any ties between ugly bugs. The description may include, but is not limited to, the following:

1. We call it a "bug", but what is it, really? Give the bug's common name, and its scientific name if possible. Peterson Field Guides are an excellent source for classifying.
2. Describe some things about this "bug." Where does it live? What does it eat? How long does it live? How does it affect people or plants or animals? What is important about this bug?
3. Describe your collection of this "bug." Where did you find it? (county, town, etc.) What did you observe about its surrounding habitat?

STEP 4: Submit your Entry

Once you have collected your ugly bug, please contact following TSM member laboratories for your area to arrange for pick-up/mailing. **Be sure to include the application form with your submission.**

Area	TSM Member Lab	Contact
San Marcos, TX	Texas State University	Joyce Anderson Jha39@txstate.edu
Austin, TX	University of Texas at Austin	Michelle Mikesh mfmikesh@austin.utexas.edu
Waco, TX	Baylor University	Bernd Zechmann Bernd_zechmann@baylor.edu
Dallas, TX	University of Texas at Dallas	Josefina Arellano Josefina.arellano@utdallas.edu
College Station, TX	Texas A&M University	Stan Vitha stanvitha@tamu.edu

STEP 5: Vote for the Ugliest Bug in Texas

Vote on the **Ugly Bug** web site (<https://uglybugcontest.org/>) in January and February for the ugliest bug in Texas! The winning bug will be announced in March and will move on to the national contest.

More Information

Most Likely Bugs to be Found: The phylum ARTHROPODA will be the likely source of the bugs. Arthropods have a characteristic chitinous exoskeleton. The name Arthropoda means "jointed legs" and refers to one of the basic characteristics of the group. Most accepted entries will belong to the class INSECTA. **Remember: arachnids, including spiders, scorpions, ticks, and mites, are not accepted.**

Kingdom - ANIMALIA

Phylum - ARTHROPODA

Class – ARACHNIDA: spiders, scorpions, ticks, mites (**we do NOT accept Arachnids!**)

*Six pairs of appendages on the cephalothorax; Two for eating or stinging. Four for walking
Cephalothorax and abdomen
Often simple eyes, never compound eyes or antennae*

- Class – CHILOPODA: centipedes
*Body: many segments all alike, one pair of legs per segment
Feed on small animals*
- Class – DIPLOPODA: millipedes
*Same as Chilopoda except two pairs of legs per segment
Feed on vegetable matter*
- Class – INSECTA: grasshoppers, flies, beetles
*Three body regions - head, thorax, abdomen
Compound eye; may also have simple eye or ocelli
Three pairs of mouth parts and three pairs of thoracic legs*

A Word about Endangered Bugs...

Bugs on the Endangered Species List are not allowed to be entered. Please check for the endangered bugs native to your region. If you see one of these insects, please do not disturb it. You can search the endangered species from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Species:

<https://www.fws.gov/species/endangered-species>. Here is a link to google images:

<http://www.google.com/search?q=American+Burying+Beetle+image>

A Word About Potential Hazards of Bug Collecting...

Use care when collecting bugs! *Many* insects are capable of stinging and biting for protection from predators and therefore should always be handled with care. Wasps, bees, cicada killers, horse flies, robber flies and numerous other flying insects can yield a powerful sting if provoked. Insects such as assassin bugs (aka wheel bugs, [note wheel shape on top of thorax]) and aquatic bugs (giant water bugs, backswimmers) do not sting but have piercing mouthparts that inflict a painful bite. Centipedes (one leg per segment) are venomous and Millipedes (two legs per segment) are non-venomous and are safe to handle, but predators such as wheel bugs are venomous! Handle them with special care because they can yield a nasty bite!

About The Microscopy Society of America (MSA)

The National Ugly Bug Contest is sponsored by MSA, a nonprofit scientific and educational organization dedicated to promoting the advancement and application of microscopy and microanalysis. Through education, outreach, and professional development, MSA works to increase public understanding of science and the role of microscopy in discovery and innovation. This contest is made possible through the collaborative efforts of MSA, Local Affiliated Microscopy Societies (LAS) across the United States, Project MICRO (Microscopy in Curriculum-Research Outreach), universities, government laboratories, industry partners, and volunteer microscopists. Together, these organizations provide students with opportunities to explore the natural world, learn about biodiversity, and experience the power of advanced scientific imaging.

The National Ugly Bug Contest is designed to inspire curiosity, encourage scientific observation, and introduce students to microscopy through hands-on learning. By connecting classrooms with scientists and microscopists, the program helps foster the next generation of STEM explorers and innovators. For additional information about the Microscopy Society of America and its educational programs, please visit the contest website or the MSA website.

Safety Acknowledgement and Assumption of Risk

Participation in bug-collection activities associated with the National Ugly Bug Contest is voluntary and may involve inherent risks, including insect bites or stings, allergic reactions, exposure to plants, animals, uneven terrain, weather, and other hazards associated with outdoor activities.

Participants, and their parents/guardians or supervising teachers as applicable, are responsible for selecting safe collection locations, providing appropriate supervision, following the Contest's safety guidelines, and avoiding venomous, stinging, biting, protected, or otherwise potentially dangerous organisms.

By participating, participants and their parents/guardians acknowledge and voluntarily assume the inherent risks associated with bug collection. To the extent permitted by applicable law, the Microscopy Society of America (MSA), participating Local Affiliated Societies, and their officers, volunteers, and representatives are not responsible for injuries, allergic reactions, bites, stings, accidents, property damage, or other harm arising from the inherent risks of bug-collection activities.