

Bug Out

THEY MIGHT BE CREEPY AND CRAWLY, BUT MOST FALL-TIME INSECTS ARE HARMLESS, HELPFUL AND TOTALLY BEAUTIFUL

BY JAIME NETZER

Texas is a friendly place, so chances are you know your neighbors by name. But your property line doesn't mean anything to the native insects living in your backyard. Don't worry, though. Most are less harmful than that pesky neighbor who always needs a cup of sugar. In fact, many insects keep garden ecosystems in check, devouring invasive insects and naturally fertilizing the soil. John Abbott, curator of entomology at UT's Texas Natural Science Center, breaks down five common critters you're likely to see this fall.

1 Monarch Butterfly

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE: "If people can recognize any butterfly, it's usually a monarch," Abbott says. Look for big, orange wings with black veins.

WHAT IT EATS: Caterpillars eat milkweed, so some people plant the flower to lure Monarchs. In the fall, when the adults move south, they feed on local nectar. And they're not picky. They'll eat almost any flower.

FUN FACTS: The Monarch populations east of the Rockies

make an annual round-trip migration of impressive scope. They migrate from as far north as Canada, down to Mexico. "And we are right in that fly-way," Abbott says. Often they return to the same roosting site year after year. Scientists still don't know how Monarchs do it. "It's like you finding the same place your great-great-grandparents might have gone to, without them telling you."

2 Scorpionfly

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE: Scorpionflies have orange and black wings, red bodies and long snouts. Males have a bulbous appendage that looks like a stinger curving up over their bodies, but it just holds the reproductive structures.

WHAT IT EATS: Leaf litter and decomposing insects. "They're cleaning up the dead insects that might be in your yard," Abbott says.

FUN FACT: You'll only catch glimpses of them between mid-October and mid-November, and when you do, look closely and you might catch a moment of insect romance. "Literally, a male Scorpionfly will get a piece of a decomposing insect and present it to the female as a nuptial gift," Abbott says.

3 Luna Moth

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE: "They're really spectacular-looking," Abbott says of their big, green bodies and long tails. Look for them fluttering around lights at night.

WHAT IT EATS: Adults feed on leaves from trees like birch, hickory and walnut. But it would take high numbers of these moths to defoliate large trees. ➤

