

# IAA, Great Kids Farm Create Insect Collection

By Kirsten Petersen

When a budding botanist encounters her first garden bug, should she squeal with fright or delight?

That's the question Great Kids Farm hopes to answer with its new insect collection, developed with the help of IAA students and faculty.

The insect collection will be utilized as a year-round exhibit for students visiting Great Kids Farm, an agricultural education center owned and operated by Baltimore City Schools. Examples of native insects that are beneficial to Maryland crops will be juxtaposed against invasive species and garden pests that are disruptive to local ecosystems. The exhibit will serve as a cheat sheet for young gardeners when they identify creepy-crawlies in their backyards.



This beetle specimen is one of many critters acquired for the insect collection. *Photo by Deborah Lakowicz-Dramby*

“We have a strong push for kids to develop gardens,” said Bethany Mathie, the farm educator for Great Kids Farm, “but we want them to identify [insects] and know what’s there.”

Great Kids Farm decided to create an insect collection in June 2011 and Mathie recruited the IAA to get the project started. Under the guidance of Dr. Kevin Mathias, Deborah Lakowicz-Dramby, a sustainable agriculture student, is working on the collection.

“[Great Kids Farm is] always looking to make the curriculum interesting for kids. What’s better than a real specimen?” Lakowicz-Dramby said.

As a contributor, Lakowicz-Dramby collects insects—dead or alive—on campus or near her home. If she finds a living specimen, she captures the insect in a “kill jar” lined with ethyl acetate, which causes the insect to die without damaging its exterior. Mathias, who teaches “INAG 231: Insects of Ornamentals and Turfgrass,” showed Lakowicz-Dramby how to pin a specimen for display.

So far, the collection consists of ground beetles and flies that are often mistaken for roaches and bees. Mathie and Lakowicz-Dramby plan to acquire as many critters as possible to display a wide variety of insects.

“It’s going to be really beneficial for the kids,” said Mathie. “[They’ll] get to see real bugs, rather than pictures.”



The insect collection will encourage students to explore their own gardens. *Photo by Deborah Lakowicz-Dramby*

Great Kids Farm opened as an educational center in 2009 and works to bring agricultural education to Baltimore City school students. Hundreds of students visit the farm each month to learn about food production and soil science. Mathie believes that the insect collection will attract more interest in the “Insects” field trip theme and serve as an alternative to outdoor topics in the winter.

“We’re trying to make it better and stronger,” Mathie said.

This exhibit aims to squash misconceptions about common insects, particularly those established in suburban environments.

“We’re such an indoors society and there’s this idea of ‘Ew, a bug,’” Lakowicz-Dramby said. She hopes the collection will encourage students to appreciate nature, especially the insects.

“They’re brave insects donating their lives for science,” Lakowicz Dramby added. “They’re pioneers.”