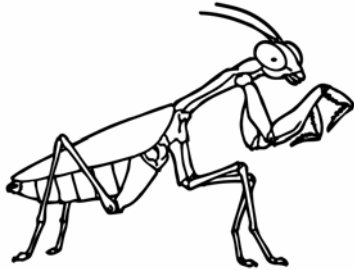


PRAYING MANTIS



Named for the prayer-like position in which it holds its front legs, the praying mantis is a mysterious, exotic-looking insect. We all think we know what a mantis looks like, but did you know there are 2000 species in the praying mantid family? What is a praying mantis, really?

“Praying mantis” is the name commonly used to refer to any of the 2000 species, especially the larger ones. Mantises range in size from half an inch to over six inches. They are carnivores, eating live prey, especially insects, that they stalk and catch themselves. They have also been observed eating lizards, snakes, frogs, birds, and rodents. They are also famous cannibals, especially during mating: it is not uncommon for the female to eat the male after or even during mating!

The praying mantis is found in temperate and tropical areas. About 20 species are native to the United States. This insect has a life span of about 12 months in the wild. It is the only insect that can turn its head 180 degrees or more. Some species can turn the head as much as 300 degrees without moving the rest of the body, which aids in hunting. The mantis uses its good eyesight to hunt. It usually waits motionless for its prey to move in range, and then grabs it with a movement too quick to see, grasping it with its spiked forelegs.

Praying mantises have a protective coloration. They resemble their environment, usually green or brown. Some species in Africa even molt and change their color to black to blend in after a fire!

There are three phases in the life of a praying mantis: egg, nymph, and adult. The nymphs that hatch from the eggs closely resemble adults, but they are tiny and lack wings. They molt several times as they grow, shedding their old exoskeletons when they become too small.

Although the praying mantis bears a slight resemblance to a grasshopper, the two insects are not related. The closest relatives of the mantis are termites and cockroaches. Despite this, the mantis is not usually thought of as a pest. Some gardeners even raise praying mantises to eat other harmful insects in their gardens. Unfortunately, the mantis eats any insect it can find, including beneficial insects, so be careful!

Name _____ Date _____

ANSWER THE QUESTIONS ABOUT *THE PRAYING MANTIS*

1. Where did the praying mantis get its name?
 - a. It preys on insects.
 - b. It holds its front legs in an attitude of prayer.
 - c. Early Christians used the praying mantis when they prayed.
 - d. The article doesn't say.

2. How many species of praying mantis are there?
 - a. 2000
 - b. 12
 - c. hundreds
 - d. 180

3. Where is the habitat of the praying mantis?
 - a. temperate areas
 - b. tropical areas
 - c. arctic and temperate areas
 - d. temperate and tropical areas

4. What are the closest relatives of the praying mantis?
 - a. grasshoppers and crickets
 - b. earthworms
 - c. termites and cockroaches
 - d. wood lice

5. What are the pros and cons of having praying mantises in your garden?

Answers to *PRAYING MANTIS*

1. b
2. a
3. d
4. c
5. Answers will vary, but “pros” should include the fact that the praying mantis eats harmful insects, and “cons” the fact that they also eat beneficial insects.