

How to Avoid Hurting Insects

Like humans, insects are animals that sense harmful stimuli and seek to avoid them. Some scientists believe that insects are conscious and hence are aware that they're in pain when injured.^{[1][2]}

Christof Koch, one of the world's leading neuroscientists, said: "We have literally no idea at what level of brain complexity consciousness stops." And as a result: "I don't kill bugs needlessly anymore."^[3]

This article suggests ways that we all can avoid needlessly harming insects.

Steps

1 Avoid silk.

- Silk production involves boiling silk worms alive.^[4] About 10,000 silk worms are killed to produce a single sari dress.^[5]

2 Avoid shellac and confectioner's glaze.

- Shellac is a resin with many uses,^[6] including wood polishes like "French polish", primers, dyes, and confectioner's resin -- which is used to polish some foods like certain fruits, chewing gum, and candies.^[7]
- Between 50,000 and 300,000 lac bugs are required to produce 1 kilogram of shellac.^[8]
- The Vegetarian Resource Group has a [list](#) of candies that do and don't contain shellac. As an example, candy corn and Milk Duds contains shellac, while M&M's and Skittles do not.
- Shellac has food-additive number E904 in the European Union.^[9]

3 Drive less, especially less in the rain.

- A study in the UK reported in 2004 that a postcard-sized area of the front of a car squashes into one insect for every 5 miles (8.0 km) driven.^[10] A similar study in the Netherlands in 2011 found one insect squashed on a license-plate-sized area of the car for every 3.1 miles (5.0 km) driven.^[11]
- During rainstorms, worms, slugs, and other small critters may crawl onto roads, where cars then run over them. If these animals are on your roads, try to reduce how much you drive when the road is wet.

4 Walk on pavement rather than grass.

- Soil, especially grassy areas, is teeming with little insects that may be crushed by your footsteps.
- If it's raining and worms or slugs are out on the sidewalk, watch your step to avoid them if possible.
- Shoes with lower surface area (e.g. because of heels) may crush fewer insects per step.

5 Keep insects out of your house. Otherwise they'll get trapped inside to die there and possibly to lay eggs. You also might step on them accidentally.

- Don't keep the door open when you're not using it.
- Keep screens on all open windows.
- Seal cracks in walls.

6 Avoid leaving food waste that will attract ants, flies, or other insects.

- You can find more specific advice by using a search engine with a query like this: {ants in house vegan} if you want to prevent or deal with an ant infestation in your house in a humane way.

7 Don't leave standing water in buckets, trays, tarps, etc.

- Insects may get caught in these and drown.
- Also, standing water may breed mosquitoes.^[12]

8 Free insects trapped in your house (except in winter).

- Scoop up bugs on the floors into paper or a ziploc bag and take them outside.
- Use a ziploc bag to catch flies, moths, and other flying insects. Zip up the bag, take it outside, and release the insect. Alternatively, you can trap the insect in a jar and slide paper under it to capture it. Or use a bug net if you have one.

9 Euthanize insects by quickly and completely crushing them, ideally with a hard, flat object. Sometimes you accidentally injure a bug, or you see a bug that's sickly and in pain. In these cases it may be best to mercy-kill it -- but only if you can crush it instantaneously.

- Try putting the insect on a piece of scrap paper and then slamming a wooden board or other hard, flat surface across it, squashing it out onto the paper. The paper's friction helps ensure the insect will be completely crushed. Sometimes insects have hard shells, making it more difficult to kill them painlessly in this way.
- Don't just crush the head, because insects have more distributed nervous systems than vertebrates.^{[13][14]}
- Generally avoid killing with flyswatters or your hands because these may not crush the insects completely.

10 **Research bigger-picture ways to reduce insect suffering.** Most of the harm that the world's insects endure results from natural causes. Explore what ecology and ethology have to say about the potential for reducing [suffering by insects in nature](#).^[15]

11 **Talk about the moral importance of insect suffering with friends, family, and coworkers, as well as in online forums.**

Warnings

- **Don't expend too much effort on these suggestions.** The goal is to adopt easy habits to reduce your harm to insects over the long term. It's ok if you kill a few bugs here and there. That's better than trying too hard and then giving up. Don't let the best be the enemy of the good.
- **Focus mainly on the most injurious activities,** such as possibly silk and shellac consumption.
- **Increasing concern for insects and other powerless creatures** may be the most important action of all, because changing ethical values and social norms has long-term effects on humanity's future.

Sources and Citations

1. ↑ ["The moral standing of insects and the ethics of extinction"](#)
2. ↑ [Alun Anderson on Edge](#)
3. ↑ ["Consciousness in a Cockroach"](#)
4. ↑ ["Why Vegans Don't Use Silk"](#)
5. ↑ ["Taking the Violence Out of Silk"](#)
6. ↑ [Shellac uses](#)
7. ↑ [Confectioner's glaze](#)
8. ↑ [Shellac production](#)
9. ↑ [Additive E904](#)
10. ↑ ["40,000 'splatometers' can't be wrong: insect population is in decline"](#)
11. ↑ ["Trillions of Insects Killed by Cars Every Year, Says Study"](#)
12. ↑ ["Mosquitoes Around the Home"](#)
13. ↑ [It's Alive!: The Science of B-Movie Monsters](#)
14. ↑ [What the Ocean Provides](#)
15. ↑ ["Debunking the Idyllic View of Natural Processes"](#)

Article Info

Categories: [Animal and Insect Safety](#)

Thanks to all the authors for contributing: [Brian Tomasik](#), [Gracesmile123](#) ([see all](#))

Thanks to all authors for creating a page that has been read 829 times.