

Bug Bites

Bug-covered popcorn that was served at an event called Incredible Edible Insects

You may think of insects as creepy, crawly pests. But a growing number of Americans say bugs can be a healthy treat.

Lisa Monachelli set out some unusual snacks. She was at a library in Woodbridge, Connecticut, last month. The cookies had crickets pressed into them. And the popcorn was covered in crickets, mealworms, and 3-inch-long hissing cockroaches!

“Do we *have to* eat bugs?” asked 10-year-old Sophia Cossitt-Levy.

Monachelli explained that the kids didn’t have to eat insects. But she offered some reasons why they might want to try bugs. Her bug-covered treats were part of an event called Incredible Edible Insects.

Words to Know

alternative (awl-TUR-nuh-tiv) *noun*. another option or choice

cultivating (KUHL-tuh-vayt-ing) *verb*. raising or aiding the growth of something, especially crops

The program educates kids on the benefits of eating insects.

“Hopefully, kids will look at bugs as a food rather than something icky,” Monachelli says. She works at the Stamford Museum & Nature Center.

People in many countries think of insects as Monachelli does. They view them as tasty, nutritious treats. About 2 billion people around the world make bugs a part of their diet. Eating insects is slowly becoming more popular in the United States.

The Business of Bugs

In the past, most Americans would have been grossed out to see a bug at a restaurant. Now ants, crickets, grasshoppers, and other insects are appearing on a growing number of restaurant menus.

It’s not only restaurants that are getting into the bug business.

Earlier this year, Elliot Mermel opened a cricket farm in Van Nuys, California. He raises crickets, and then grinds them into powder. The powder is used to make foods like energy bars and cookies. The farm is one of the first in the country to raise crickets only for humans to eat. Mermel is surprised by the demand for his cricket powder.

“We thought the biggest problem was going to be convincing people to eat insects,” he says. “Now the biggest problem



A.J. Browning, age 7, tastes a cricket cookie.

is growing enough insects to give to the people that want them.”

Why Eat Insects?

Many people snack on bugs as a nutritious **alternative** to beef, chicken, and other meats. Crickets are a good source of calcium. Calcium helps build strong bones and teeth. Crickets and grasshoppers also provide protein. Protein is a necessary part of a healthy diet.

Farming insects is also better for the environment than raising cows, chickens, and pigs. Raising those animals requires a lot of food, water, and land. **Cultivating** insects uses up much less of those resources.

The “Ick” Factor

Not all bugs are good for you, though. Eating most types will make you sick. Stick to insects that experts say are edible. They should also be fully cooked.

To many people, it doesn't matter how bugs are prepared or how nutritious they are. They still don't want to eat insects. But Monachelli says attitudes are slowly changing.

“It's been interesting to see how people are going from the total disgust factor to being a little more open about this food source,” she says.

Sophia is proof of that. She finally felt brave enough to try the buggy popcorn. She popped a mealworm into her mouth. She was surprised by the taste.

“They taste like french fries without the salt,” she said.

—by Lindsay Lowe

On the Menu

More than 1,900 types of insects and arachnids (including some spiders and scorpions) are edible. Check out these bug dishes from around the world. Would you try them?



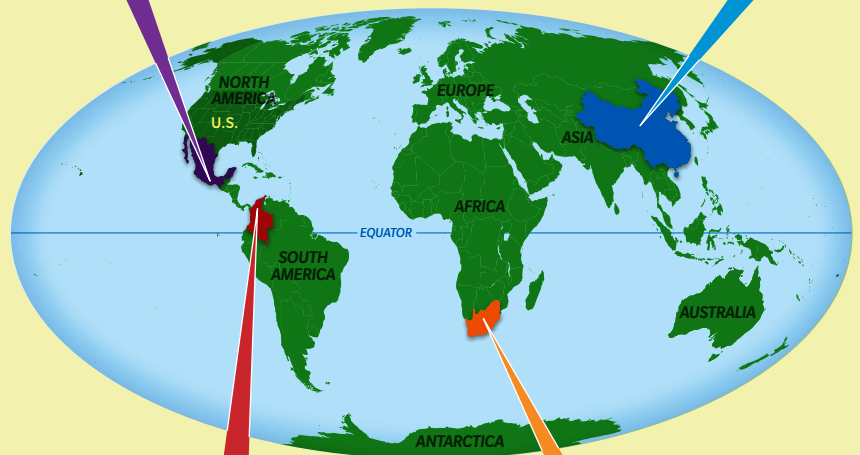
Grasshoppers

Fried *chapulines*, or grasshoppers, add an extra crunch to tacos in southwestern Mexico.



Scorpions

In China and some other countries in Asia, street vendors sell these fried critters on a stick.



Giant Ants

People in northern Colombia often snack on these salty, crispy toasted ants.



Mopane Worms

In South Africa, people fry these chewy grubs with tomatoes and onions. (They're actually caterpillars, not worms.)

