

Jerusalem crickets draw the most questions

Question: My goodness! I found the most disgusting bug lying on my patio this morning! I called my neighbor over and she said it was a potato bug. Is it? Can you tell me about it?

Answer: Of all the insects brought into the OSU Extension Service Master Gardener Plant or Insect Clinics, the Jerusalem cricket causes by far the most curiosity because of its unusual features, especially the disproportionately-large, bald, shiny head with two dark, beady eyes that are widely set just below long, slender antennae.

People are frightened at first when they run across these bizarre



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looking insects but they are not poisonous, nor do they bite, unless pestered or provoked. Most often they will turn and try to run away to hide.

Orthoptera is an order of insects that comprises grasshoppers, locusts and crickets, including the closely related katydids. The order is subdivided into two suborders: 1) Caelifera, which includes grasshoppers and locusts and 2) Ensifera, which includes true crickets,

Jerusalem crickets and bush crickets.

True crickets, like all insects, have six legs, two antennae and three body parts and are very closely related to grasshoppers, sharing distinctively large back legs. Crickets and grasshoppers also have leathery front wings called “tegmina” which help protect their back wings.

There are three different families of crickets: Gryllidae (field, house and tree crickets), Gryllacrididae (camel crickets and cave crickets), and Gryllotalpidae (mole crickets). Most kinds of crickets lay eggs in the soil, and male crickets “chirp” to attract females – a familiar sound known

as stridulation – produced by rubbing their wings against their legs which contain rows of corrugated bumps.

Most crickets are active at night and hide during the day under rocks and logs.

Katydids, or bush crickets, belong to the family Tettigoniidae and were previously known as long-horned grasshoppers. In Latin, tettigonia means leafhopper, and these insects are extremely good at camouflage since their shapes and colors are similar to leaves. The name katydid comes from their loud three-pulsed song, often sounding like “ka-ty-did.”

The Jerusalem crickets are a type of North

American humpbacked camel cricket in a group of large, flightless insects of the family Stenopelmatoidea. Jerusalem crickets are also called “Child of the Earth” by the Navajo Indians or “Potato Bugs” because they have been found in potato fields feeding on the roots and tubers of the crop.

This is confusing, as often the potato beetle – which only feeds on above-ground parts of plants – is also referred to as a potato bug and is a true pest as it destroys thousands of potato plants annually.

Similar to true crickets, Jerusalem crickets produce songs during mating in the form of a

characteristic drumming in which the insect beats its abdomen against the ground.

These nocturnal insects spend most of their lives in the ground and use their strong mandibles to feed primarily on dead organic matter but can also eat other insects, including their mates! Their highly adapted feet are used for burrowing beneath moist soil and they can emit a foul smell.

Jerusalem crickets are an especially favorite meal for owls, coyotes and foxes because they come out of the ground at night to roam around. Often coming to the surface on warm evenings or after a rain, they are rarely a problem for humans.