

Now, the VOA Special English program Words and Their Stories.

There are many American expressions about insects -- like bees, for example. Bees are known as very hard workers. They always appear to be busy, moving around their homes, or hives. So you might say you were "as busy as a bee" if you spent your weekend cleaning your house. In fact, you might say your house was "a beehive of activity" if your whole family was helping you clean.

You also might say you "made a beeline" for something if you went there right away. When we go to see a movie, my friend always "makes a beeline" for the place where they sell popcorn.

Here is an expression about bees that is not used much anymore, but we like it anyway. We think it was first used in the 1920s. If something was the best of its kind, you might say it was "the bee's knees." Now, we admit that we do not know how this expression developed -- in fact, we do not even know if bees have knees!

If your friend cannot stop talking about something because she thinks it is important, you might say she has “a bee in her bonnet.” If someone asks you a personal question, you might say “That is none of your beeswax.” This means “none of your business.”

Speaking of personal questions, there is an expression people sometimes use when their children ask, “Where do babies come from?” Parents who discuss sex and reproduction say this is talking about “the birds and the bees.”

Hornets are bee-like insects that sometimes attack people. If you are really angry, you might say you are “mad as a hornet.” And if you “stir up a hornet’s nest,” you create trouble or problems.

Butterflies are beautiful insects, but you would not want to have “butterflies in your stomach.” That means to be nervous about having to do something, like speaking in front of a crowd. You would also not want to have “ants in your pants” -- that is, to be restless and unable to sit still.

Here are some expressions about plain old bugs -- another word for insects. If a friend keeps asking you to do something you do not want to do, you might ask him to leave you alone or "Stop bugging me." A friend also might tell you again and again to do something. If so, you might say he "put a bug in your ear."

If you were reading a book in your warm bed on a cold winter's day, you might say you were "snug as a bug in a rug." And, if you wish someone good night, you might say, "Sleep tight -- don't let the bedbugs bite."

This VOA Special English program was written by Shelley Gollust. I'm Barbara Klein. You can find more Words and Their Stories at voaspecialenglish.com.



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