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# Backyard Bug Safari: A Kansas City Parent's Guide to Tiny Creature Hunting

Nature | Spring | Ages 4-7

Last week my four-year-old found a roly-poly under our porch step and carried it around for twenty minutes like it was a pet hamster. That's when I realized we were sitting on free entertainment.

You don't need Loose Park or Shawnee Mission Park for a nature adventure. Your backyard has an entire ecosystem happening right now under rocks, in mulch, and around that one forgotten flowerpot.

## What You Need

- Magnifying glass (the cheap ones from Target work fine)
  - Clear jar with a lid — poke air holes with a nail or skip the lid entirely
  - Field guide or bug ID app (we like iNaturalist)
  - Small notebook and pencil
  - Old spoon for gentle bug wrangling

## How to Run Your Safari

Start after morning dew dries but before it gets too hot. Bugs hide when it's scorching.

Check the usual suspects first. Flip over rocks, look under deck boards, peek in mulch beds. Roly-polies love dark, damp spots. So do beetles and earwigs. We found a crazy number of ants near our downspout last spring.

Make it a hunt, not a lecture. Give your kid the magnifying glass and let them lead. When they find something, look it up together. Count legs. Notice colors. My daughter insisted a beetle was "wearing a green jacket" and honestly, she wasn't wrong.

The catch-and-release rule. Bugs go in the jar for observation, then back where you found them. Set a timer for ten minutes max. This isn't a permanent pet situation, no matter how much they beg.

## What We've Learned

Worms appear after rain. Obvious, but my kids act like it's magic every time.

Ants are everywhere. Everywhere. If you want an easy win, start there.

Spiders freak some kids out. We do a "look but don't touch" policy for anything with eight legs.

The best bug hunting happens in May and early June in KC. Once July heat hits, you'll find fewer critters and more complaints about being sweaty.

**Kansas City Bonus** If your backyard safari goes well, try Cave Springs in Swope Park or the prairie areas at Burr Oak Woods. Both have interpretive centers where rangers actually know bug names and don't mind kid questions.

Our neighborhood in Brookside has limestone chunks in some yards — those hide the best bugs. If you're in newer developments south of the river, check mulch beds around young trees.

One last thing: take photos of your finds. My phone is full of blurry beetle pictures, and my kids love scrolling through their "collection" on rainy days.

