

# How Insects Find Their Food: Hunt Like Army Ants

*Please use this checklist to confirm that all of the parts of this station are in this bag both when it is unpacked before the OSF Science Night AND when it is re-packed after your event.*

- Table sign, laminated
- Explanation/ What to Do sheet, laminated
- Large box lid filled with dry leaves and 29 plastic roaches
- 2 - blindfolds
- 2 – My Chron timers

## **What you will need to provide for this activity station:**

- Tape to attach table sign
- Plastic insect or candy incentives are optional

## **HOW INSECTS FIND THEIR FOOD HUNT LIKE ARMY ANTS (Game 1)**

### **Explanation/Background:**

Like other ants, army ants are social insects. The army ant colonies consist of queens, wingless workers, and immature forms like eggs, larvae, and pupae. Unlike other ants, the colonies do not have permanent locations but are either on the move or ‘resting’ in a protected spot, like under a log. When the colony moves, the ants cross over the soil and low vegetation and through plant litter in column or fan formations. They link their legs to make living bridges over water. The workers search for small animals and insects to eat. They generally don’t sting their prey but use their strong jaws to eat their victims. Being almost entirely blind, the colonies use odors to stay together. They use smell and touch to find their food. We have native army ants in Georgia, but they are not as noticeable as those found “marching” through the tropical rainforests.



### **What You Will Do:**

Like army ants, students will find “food” in plant litter by using touch instead of sight.

### **What You Need:**

- Tray (box lid)
- Dead leaves
- Blindfolds (cloth or plastic masks)
- “Food”: wrapped candies, plastic insects, etc.
- Stop watch
- If using plastic masks, provide antibacterial wipes to clean mask after use.

**What To Do:**

1. Fill a tray (box lid) with a few pieces of “Food” and lots of dead leaves.
2. Use the background explanation to relate the activity to army ant behavior.
3. Explain that army ants are nearly blind so they use their sense of touch to find food; consequently the participants will be blindfolded.
4. Blindfold the participants and explain that they are trying to find “Food” in the leaves the way army ants do.
5. Give the participants 15-30 seconds to find “Food”.
6. Take off the blindfold.
7. Participants may keep the “Food” rewards they have found.
8. Make sure to replenish “Food” supply as more participants play the game, and if using plastic masks, clean them with antibacterial wipes.