

Activity: What is a pest?

Goals

- 1) Learn that people can have different opinions about what a pest is
- 2) Learn that even if an organism is a pest sometimes, it may be beneficial other times
- 3) Learn that there are actually very few species we consider human pests

Background: We all think we know what a pest is, but actually it is a very human-centric term. An ant may be a pest in the kitchen, but outside they are very beneficial. Multicolored Asian lady beetles drive us crazy coming indoors in the fall, but all summer they are out in our gardens eating pest insects. We tend to label something a pest when it is doing something to bother us.

Pest can refer to insects, weeds, plant diseases, animals. Depending on the class you can remain focused on just insect pests, or expand the discussion to other things humans call pests.

Activity

Have students spend 2-3 minutes writing a list of 10 things they call pests (it can be insects, plant diseases, weeds, and animals)

Have the students share their list in small groups. Are there some organisms several had on their lists? Are there some that members of the group disagreed about? Let the students discuss in a group for 5-10min then call the class together.

Have each group present to the class and write on the board several organisms they agreed were pests and any that they disagreed about.

Lead a class discussion on what the definition of a pest is. Choose an insect that most groups felt were a pest. Discuss the characteristics of this insect that make it a pest. If there is an insect that group had disagreement about, discuss the characteristics of that insect and why they are not certain if it is a pest or not. As a class define what a pest is.

The take home-point should be that pests interfere with humans in some way and that people can have different definitions of what is a pest.