

RESOURCE

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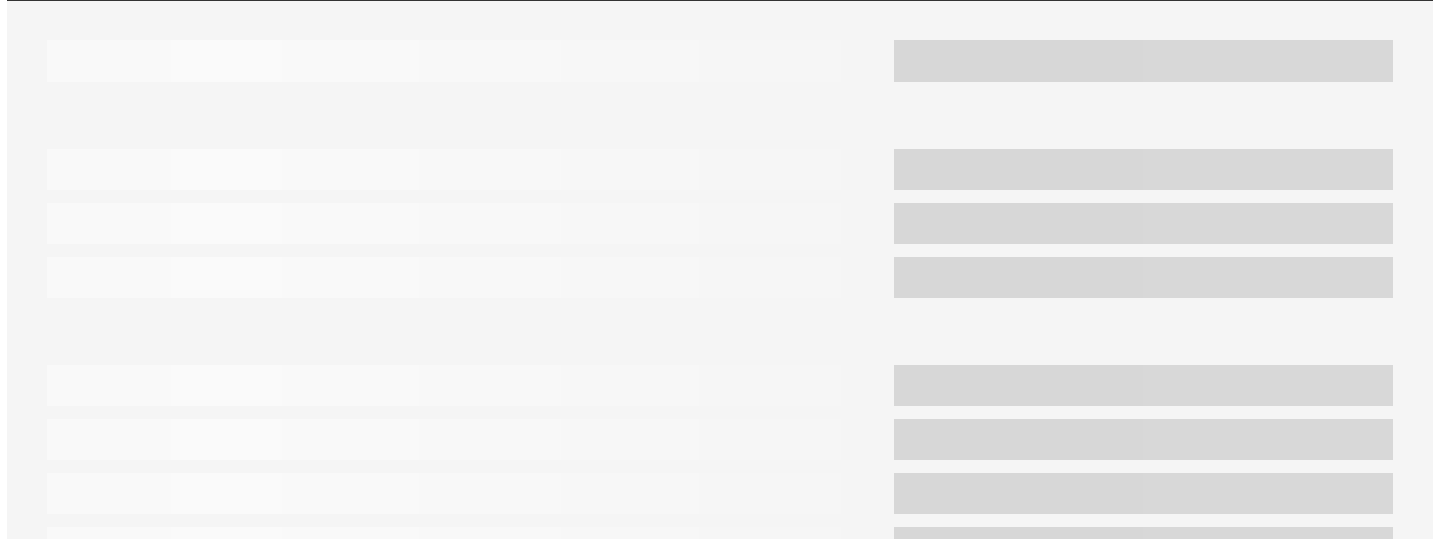
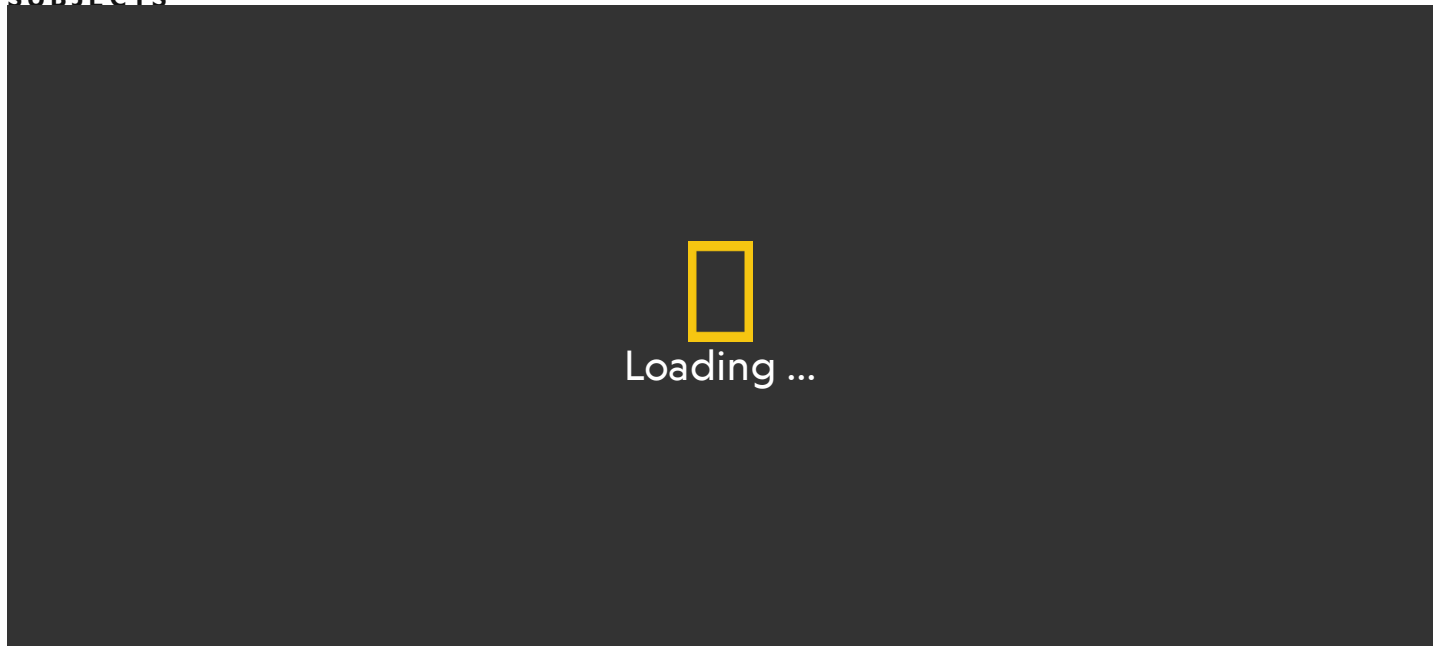
Crispy Critters

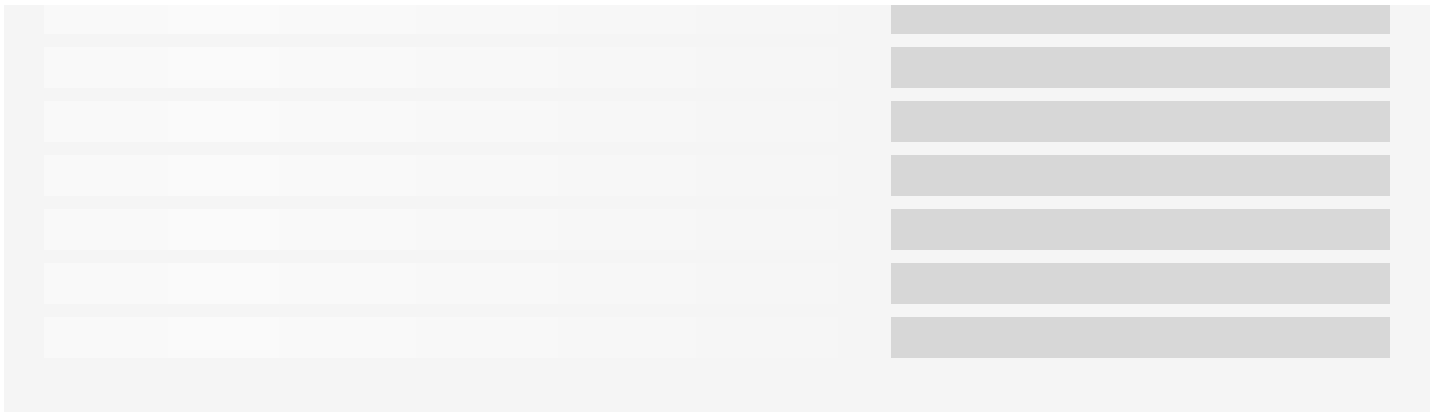
David George Gordon, "The Bug Chef," describes how he makes tempura-battered tarantula and cooks up other insects.

GRADES

3 - 12+

SUBJECTS





BACKGROUND INFO

VOCABULARY

David George Gordon creates recipes that might bug some people out—scorpion scaloppini, three-bee salad, and “Pest-O,” a take on the popular Italian sauce using dried and pulverized weevils. Gordon, who travels the world as “The Bug Chef” doing cooking demonstrations, developed the dishes for his 1998 hit *The Eat-a-Bug Cookbook*.

Gordon says he has always been interested in learning and sharing information about the less-popular organisms in the natural world. Before compiling the cookbook, he wrote insect-themed books such as *The Compleat Cockroach*, a 178-page book about the frequently despised insect.

“It’s actually the underdogs that have fascinated me,” he says. “Things like cockroaches, slugs, and snails are more fascinating than whales and dolphins, which everybody knows are wonderful.”

Researching Recipes

Gordon turned from research to recipes after attending a Seattle, Washington, insect fair in 1995. There, he tasted Chex Mix—with crickets in it. “The crickets themselves actually have a very mild, shrimp-like flavor,” he says. “And they also have a nutty flavor as well. So they actually were quite good, particularly mixed in with these other things and seasoned.”

Inspired, Gordon set about gathering recipes in an unorthodox fashion. “I kind of made up a long list of 30 names for dishes that would be in the book,” he says. “Some of them were bad puns. For example, ‘Pest-O’ is one of the recipes in there. I didn’t really have the recipe worked out yet. I just thought it sounded great.”

While researching the recipes, Gordon learned that people in most parts of the world eat insects. The cultures of Europe, and the regions they colonized, are the exception. People in the Middle East dine on locusts, while Cambodians deep-fry spiders. Africans and South Americans harvest a seemingly endless supply of ants and termites for food.

Gordon says he looked into how cultures around the world cooked insects. “A lot of them started out as indigenous cuisine,” he says. “People in other parts of the world eat dragonflies, and in Indonesia, they call that dish ‘sky prawns.’”

One of Gordon’s recipes, which will appear in an updated version of his cookbook, is tempura-battered tarantula. “I go through this whole procedure where I singe off all the body hairs, and I remove the abdomen,” he says. “I batter this thing and deep fry it. When it comes out, it’s actually really tasty.”

Gordon's signature dish is Orthopteran Orzo, a pasta with sautéed crickets and more conventional ingredients like red peppers, onions, and garlic. "I've actually had people come back for seconds and thirds of that dish," he says. "One time, I had a kid come back for fifths."

But Gordon's favorite insect to ingest is waxworms, the caterpillar larvae of wax moths. "The waxworms get their name because as caterpillars they actually eat the wax from the honeycomb of a beehive," he says. "So here are these little critters that are about half an inch long—little white caterpillars—and in their short lives they are eating wax and honey. What's not to like about that?"

Spreading the Word

Once it was released, the cookbook put Gordon in the spotlight. "*The Eat-a-Bug Cookbook* came out in 1998, and it was an immediate hit," Gordon says. "I was on [*Late Night with*] *Conan O'Brien* and *The View* and a lot of TV shows doing my cooking demonstrations."

Thirteen years later, Gordon still does cooking demonstrations at events such as the Houston Zoo's Bug Brunch and BuzzFest at The Wild Center in Tupper Lake, New York.

Though dining on items like Gordon's waxworm-filled Alpha-Bait Soup might not be everyone's dish, he says most insects are packed with nutrition.

"I hey say that pound for pound, dried grasshoppers are close in protein value to ground beef, and they have way less fat," he says. "They are probably better for you. A lot of insects are really rich in vitamins and minerals. Crickets, for example, are very rich in calcium. Termites, believe it or not, are very rich in iron."

Gordon says that collecting bugs for food is an environmentally sound way to supplement the items that we already eat. "If people went out and handpicked insects instead of spraying the crops with chemicals, you would actually get two crops from the same acre of land," he says.

Like any other resource, insects should be harvested wisely. "If everyone went out and started eating insects, we'd cause trouble," Gordon says. "It would be basically the same as overfishing the oceans. That's one of the reasons why I believe that people need to put their own energy into growing their own insects. Raising them in farms, not just harvesting them from the wild."

FAST FACT

Cooking Up an Education

David George Gordon explains why he writes unconventional science books like *The Eat-a-Bug Cookbook*. "I dont really want to just give somebody a book about insects and say, 'read this,'" he says, "because they won't. I want to find an unusual way to get the information across."

FAST FACT**Shopping for Crickets**

Wondering where to get the orthopterans for Orthopteran Orzo? Try your local pet store. Crickets and grasshoppers are frequently stocked as food for reptiles and amphibians.

Just place the live crickets in a freezer and they will slowly cool down, their metabolism will lower until they are asleep, and they will then die from the cold.

Many online stores sell live and freeze-dried crickets.

Articles & Profiles

National Geographic News: Bugs as Food—Humans Bite Back

National Geographic News: For Most People, Eating Bugs is Only Natural

website

David George Gordon

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ARTICLE

Entomologist: Dr. Dino J. Martins

Dino Martins is an Emerging Explorer and entomologist who studies the importance of pollinators, especially bees and other insects. "If you didn't...



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