

## Lighting Up the Night

Fireflies are a treasured part of summer in Michigan. There are about 170 species of these beetles in the United States and Canada, but only about 30



**Adult**

We notice fireflies because of their ability to light up. This phenomenon is called bioluminescence. The light show that we see is the courtship process for these beetles. In most species, the males fly around flashing a specific pattern. The females, perched in the grass, watch the show, and respond with the species specific pattern when they are ready to mate.

Once a female has mated, she lays eggs in the soil. After 3 or 4 weeks, the eggs hatch and the firefly larvae move to the surface of the ground or onto

trees where they hide under bark ridges. The larvae eat earthworms, terrestrial snails, slugs, and organic matter. Fireflies overwinter as larvae, digging into the ground or hiding under loose bark. The larvae also glow, warning predators of their toxicity. Fireflies can spend 1-3 years as larvae, depending on their species.

As you enjoy the summer evenings, be

sure to check grassy areas for



**Larva**

these unique beetles. Count their flashes and patterns and see how many species are hanging out in your backyard. If you're interested in helping scientists track populations of fireflies, check out Firefly Watch at <https://www.massaudubon.org/get-involved/community-science/firefly-watch>

## Be a Helping Hand

There are a few things you can do to help the declining population of fireflies.

- Minimize the use of chemical fertilizers in your yard. Fertilizers can add lethal salts to the soil, while many pesticides are indiscriminate and kill the eggs and larvae.
- Add trees and shrubs to your landscape and allow dead leaves to accumulate in some areas of your yard. This helps ensure a food and hiding places.
- Mow less! Short grass is less appealing to fireflies.



**Habitat for larvae**

**Stop by the Visitor Center Office for program information.**

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