

# Do You Know?

The color and flavor of *fats* are not of nutritive significance.

*Infra-red light* is now used in drying the finish on furniture.

The black seeds of the male *peony* were once recommended for sufferers from nightmares.

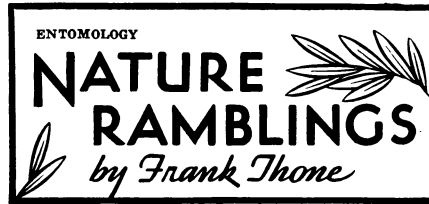
During the summer a square meter of *leaf surface* evaporates about fifty grams of water per hour.

*Crooked streams* retard the rate of flow of water from 30% to 60%; vegetation growing in the stream bed also retards flow greatly.

It was not until 1791 that the scientist *Dalton*, himself colorblind, described the now familiar phenomenon of red-green colorblindness.

When several electric *eels* are together, one or two will discharge their electricity to paralyze food for all, thus allowing the others to keep their electricity in reserve.

*Cattail fluff*, from the ordinary swamp cattail, is now used in large quantities as a stuffing in upholstery and for other purposes; it is buoyant and well suited for life-saving equipment.



Alien Ally

► INSECTS introduced from foreign lands are almost invariably regarded as pests. We automatically think of them in terms of Japanese beetle, Oriental fruit moth, Hessian fly, European corn borer and similar terms. It is no wonder, therefore, that so far as insects are concerned we all tend to be xenophobes, and look upon aliens only as undesirable aliens.

This is not necessarily the case, however. Foreign insect species may be harmless or even useful, just like foreign-born human beings. They do not irritate or annoy us, they do us no harm, and after a while we come to think of them as having been here "always"—like Mayflower descendants.

A noteworthy case of this kind, conspicuous because the creature itself is so conspicuous when you see it at all, is that of the Oriental mantis. Ordinarily we seldom see this big, rather awesome-looking insect; but when nights begin to become cool in autumn the species tends to migrate, and many specimens blunder aimlessly into cities and are thus noticed and captured.

The Oriental mantis is a formidable object to look at, even for us relatively gigantic human beings. It must be a veritable death-ogre in the insect world, for it preys on other insects as a tiger does on deer or goats, and for its size is even more bloodthirsty. The female even devours her mate, so that the wandering individuals we see are practically always of the deadlier sex.

The mantis' mode of operation is direct and simple—and a bit spine-chilling to watch. She waits motionless while her unsuspecting prey—a grasshopper, perhaps—wanders within range of those powerful, spine-armed forelegs that are

usually held in an attitude of seeming prayer. Then those tongs of doom snap on it like a trap, and despite all struggles the mantis proceeds to gnaw deliberately into the doomed victim's vitals. You find yourself beginning to feel sorry for the grasshopper, even though the front of your brain tells you that the 'hopper is your enemy and the mantis your ally.

How and when the Oriental mantis got to this country nobody seems to know very exactly. It is native to eastern Asia, including Japan, and it is common in this country mainly along our own eastern seaboard. Probably it was introduced in the form of unhatched eggs, on imported nursery stock. At any rate, it has largely displaced the much smaller native American mantis within the range it has taken over. Nobody cares much, for such effects as it has on the insect economy of the wild are on man's side of the fight. Except for the matter of relative size, it might be termed an insect Nisei.

*Science News Letter, September 1, 1945*

*Fossil redwood cones* have been discovered in the badlands of Dakota.



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