

ELF NOTES

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CYCLES

GALLS

GALL HUNTING

Once you start hunting for galls, you'll be amazed at the variety of weird, wonderful shapes, textures and sizes to be found. The most common types are found on oak trees, goldenrod, willow, spruce trees and rose stems.

Most galls develop on plants in the spring or early summer during peak growing season. However, many galls are easiest to spot in autumn or winter when the leaves are down. Look for an unusual swelling on a stem or twig. See if you can find an exit hole. Count the holes to see how many insects lived inside. If a gall has no exit hole, the inhabitant is still inside. Tie some fine netting around any whole galls you find and check them often to see what emerges. Some insect galls are used only briefly, during warm seasons. Others are inhabited through the winter.

A gall is an abnormal growth of plant tissue. Galls occur when some irritation or chemical stimulus outside of a plant causes a part of the plant to swell or grow in a peculiar way. Gall growth can be induced by a number of organisms including fungi, viruses, mites, and, most commonly, insects. You may find galls on grasses, vines, trees, and flowers.

Galls come in a fantastic variety of colors, shapes, sizes and textures. They may be found on any part of a plant, but they only develop while that part of the plant is growing.

Gall-making insects produce a specific kind of gall that usually grows on one species of plant. An insect or mite gall provides a home and food for developing young. The gall also provides safety from parasites and predators and protects them from drying out.

The goldenrod ball gallfly is one kind of insect that spends a part of its life cycle inside of a gall. The adult fly lays eggs on the goldenrod stem, the larva burrows into the stem and a ball-shaped gall forms around it. The larva develops and pupates inside the gall and later emerges as an adult to continue the life cycle.

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