

## ***Maggot Art***

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Maggot art is a fun way to introduce kids to insects, in particular, fly larvae. It is really aimed at children around aged 6-14 or so but it does appeal to younger and older siblings and even parents!

The basic premise is dipping prepupal blow fly larvae (Diptera: Calliphoridae) into non-toxic ink and then placing them on a piece of paper or file card and letting them crawl around to create an abstract picture. Different larvae are used in different colours to create the picture. Rebecca O'Flaherty first demonstrated this at a North American Forensic Entomology Association Meeting many years ago, and it is a popular activity and many youtubes can be viewed to see how it works.

### ***What you need:***

1. A big table covered in brown paper to protect it.
2. Maggots – preferably large and prepupal so no longer feeding and with a strong desire to crawl (looking for a pupariation site). Blow flies are good but flesh flies would also work. Keep maggots in a large jar in sawdust with paper towel over the opening, held in place by an elastic band to prevent escape and have a second jar, with layers of paper towel for maggots to be placed in once 'used' so the paint wipes off them as they crawl. It should be pointed out to concerned parents that the maggots are not hurt in this procedure (unless their kids squish them too hard!) as it is their natural life to crawl in wet things and the paints are non-toxic.
3. Non-toxic, liquid paint – any dollar store. Lots of colours
4. Plastic forceps for the kids to pick up the maggots
5. Little dishes or mini palettes – also from a dollar store, or little cups such as those you put ketchup in at a burger place, to hold different colours of paint. The little palettes are the best as they hold about 6 colours at once.

6. Small, plain file cards – 3x5 or bigger if you like but small works quite well as the child finishes their art faster. Can also use coloured file cards as well. Nice to print your own logo or contact info on the card.
7. Lots of paper towel to clean up as you go along. It isn't actually that messy as the kids use forceps.
8. Sharpies so the kids can write their name on their card.
9. Small dishes such as petri dishes to put the maggot in when given to the child.

***What you do:***

Ideally, you want a bunch of volunteers – usually this is a great way to get your entomology students – grad or undergrad, involved.

Set up as many 'stations' as you can handle. Each should have a new card, and a palette of paints together with a pair of forceps.

When the kids come over, you explain they are going to paint with maggots, yes, live maggots, and you give them a maggot – put it in the petri dish so they can pick it up themselves with the forceps – no fingers please.

They then chose their colour, dip the maggot gently, then place it on the file card and let it wriggle over the card. The child can re-use the maggot, or if it looks a bit tired, give them a new one. Once their card is covered in lovely squiggles they can sign it and keep their card.

Maggots go into the jar with paper towel and can be re-used.

***The Point?***

To have fun with insects.

To let kids see that insects are fun and are not gross and slimy.

To let kids get up close and personal with insects and ask questions

To see that girls can do science! My volunteers are usually all female.

Meanwhile, you can tell them about why the maggots are crawling, what the maggots actually are, explain about metamorphosis, how maggots are used in forensic entomology, right up to careers in science – it is a great chance to chat to them and to their parents who are usually also fascinated.