

What do you call that bug under the big rock?

Written by gallupsun

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I'm going to confess to a murder, acknowledging there probably aren't any statutes of limitations on this kind of thing. Growing up, my sister and I sprinkled salt on our fair share of slugs. While I'm not proud of my salty slug serial killing spree, exploring under big rocks in the backyard was a great way to learn about the creepy-crawly world around me.

Let's turn over the next big rock. It's the one next to the shed. Once you get enough leverage to hoist the rock from its resting place, you see several things scurry around — some squirming worms, a truly terrifying millipede and a host of bugs that roll into little balls.

What are those balled-up bugs called? If you grew up in Oklahoma, you'd refer to them as roly polies. These land-lubber crustaceans hail from the family "armadillidiidae," which makes me happy. If you look at one, it's essentially the bug version of an armadillo. One time, I chased an armadillo on a dirt road at night on foot, but that's a story for another day.

What I love about roly polies is that they have dozens of regional and colloquial names. I can't think of a thing that has more naming variations. For instance, you may refer to them as potato bugs, pill bugs or doodlebugs. Or perhaps you call them butchy boys or wood shrimp. These examples are just from the U.S.

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As the armadillidium family can be found in many areas of the world, each area has its own naming convention. In the UK, these cute bugs are called cheesy bugs, cheeselogs, Parson's pigs, chiggy pigs, hardbacks, carpet shrimp or gramersows, depending on from where you hail.

While in Australia, you may call them slater bugs or butcher boys, in Denmark, roly polies are called bench biters. Likewise, in Germany, people say cellar bugs, while in areas of South America, the locals refer to the armadillidium family of insects as little pigs.

If I were rebranding a minor league baseball team in 2024, I think I would change the name of the team based on the area of the country the team visited. The team logo would stay the same, but the word on the front of the jersey would shift. If anyone decides to try this idea, I'd like a 10% cut of merchandise sales.

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