

Tommy Time



Hi Kids, I'm Dr. Tommy Prawn, I'm a mad scientist that lives in the river Shannon in Ireland. My good friends at Nature's Web rang me on the watermobile and told me ye had a few questions about science and asked if I could answer them. I told the gang at Nature's Web "no probs, of course I would try to answer the questions you asked." So here I go..... Enjoy!

Remember, if you have any other science questions, just send them into editor@naturesweb.ie and they'll pass 'em on to me!

Dr. Tommy



How Does Popcorn Pop?

Pop corn is my second favourite food after bits of worms and snails, which is what I eat. Although my mother says I'm like the rubbish bin, I'll take anything. I was eating popcorn the other evening in the cinema, with my girlfriend, Tammy van Prawnette, she is Dutch. Problem is, I'm a prawn, and we are not supposed to eat much salt. I ate too much and was so dried out I left the cinema looking like a tayto. I had to sit in the bath for an hour before I looked like my gorgeous self again. Only popcorn kernels can pop, and the secret is water. Each kernel contains a small amount of water stored in a circle of soft starch inside the hard outer casing. When heated to around 450 °F, the moisture turns to steam, creating pressure within. As the pressure builds, the casing eventually gives way, and the kernel explodes and pops, allowing the water to escape as steam and turning the kernel inside out. If you have ever popped popcorn, you know that it explodes everywhere!

Do Male Seahorses Get Pregnant?

Seahorses are the only kind of animal in the world in which it's the male that gets pregnant. Seahorses are faithful to each other and some species even stay together for life. When mating, seahorses do a kind of dance -- tails linked, inseparable. They'll promenade around the bottom, twirling around sea grass shoots or corals and this is a daily dance that will happen every single morning between them. The female injects eggs into the male, who has a pouch where the eggs are fertilized and nurtured until they're born. A seahorse, depending on the species, can deliver between 15 and 1,000 babies at a time and can deliver in the morning and get pregnant again in the afternoon.

Then again, the delivery only takes half an hour.

1,000 babies. How many nappies would you go through in a week? All I can say is I'm glad I'm not a seahorse. You would have to share your room with your 999 other brothers or sisters!



Do Maggots Really Clean Wounds?

Using leeches and maggots to clean wounds and promote their healing was not an uncommon practice hundreds of years ago. These methods are regaining popularity as antibiotics become less effective. Maggots are especially useful for aiding the healing of gangrenous infections. Maggots are immature blowflies (a type of fly) in their second or larval stage of life. Young blowfly maggots are implanted directly onto a wound, where they eat dead flesh, clean out dead skin, and kill harmful bacteria that need injured tissue to survive. Once maggots reach their fill of dead and dying flesh, they're removed from the wound and new maggots are applied. Blood can then flow throughout the tissue, promoting the growth of new flesh. How gross is that!

Dr. Tommy Prawn would like to acknowledge the help of his good friend James Ring. Text: © James Ring

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