



Questions from Deep in the Heart of Texas

Q Dear Boots, I'm working on a summer bucket list of things to do with my kids. Are there any "must do" items you would recommend?

— From, Bucketeer

A Dear Bucketeer, I have a good friend who lives in a very competitive household. Her husband and their three kids are most alive when they are either conquering or getting in position to conquer. Last summer she decided that, just for a week, she wanted a change of pace and declared their summer vacation as the perfect time to try "chilling out." At first everything was on pace. The flight was relaxed, they got their rental

car without a hitch and they made it through the grocery store without anyone challenging a race to the milk cooler.

But then about seven hours into the trip, they got in the rental house, and she said it was like her inner self could no longer handle the slow pace. All that "keeping a good distance between the rental car and the car in front of them on the highway" and the relaxed "meandering through the aisles of the store" had taken it out of her. As soon as they all dropped their luggage in their rooms, she yelled as loud as she could, "First one in their bathing suit, with their gear, ready to go to the beach, gets to pick where we have dinner tonight!" Then they were off to the races.

I tell this story, Bucketeer, because a summer bucket list gives me as much stress as thinking about being a fly on the wall of my friend's house. Over my two decades (and change) of adulthood, and especially in the

years I've had school-aged children, I've learned I don't function for long periods of time at intense speeds. When every moment is about squeezing out maximum potential, I hit an emotional wall. Not a soft, fuzzy wall that I bounce back from easily, but an electric wall. Covered with spikes. Knocking me down for the count.

I still work during the summer months, and my kids still have activities — some I do with them and some I merely chauffeur them to — but even with these responsibilities, I still need summer to feel noticeably slower. The aim is to cut to-do lists in half, not add to them. I definitely don't want to add a list that carries the potential for guilt if left undone.

Of course, not every bucket list has to be sealed with a blood promise that it will be completed before the first autumn leaf falls. Coming up with a list because you are overflowing with anticipation

for what you love about summer — popsicle-making, jumping in a couple of Texas water holes, eating evening meals under the stars — is about hope, and I'm all about that. It's when the list crosses over to expectations for a certain experience, when suddenly if a person hasn't checked off everything on the bucket list, it then becomes a source of stress, or worse, not-enoughness. That's when I look for a beach bonfire to let that list burn, baby, burn.

So no, I don't have any must-do items to suggest. My recommendation would be to jot down activities that make you feel giddy and let the rest go up in flames. If you find you are more like my good friend (who, upon reading this, will begin planning how she can get the biggest and bestest bonfire), take heart. This world of ours requires all kinds, and there is no formula for a perfect summer. Whether you choose to list or not to list, my hope is that this sunshine season will give you just what you need: 90 days of bliss however you like it — chill, not chill or blazing hot, Texas-style.

— *Love, Boots*

**Q Dear Boots,
Everybody has an opinion,
and I want one definitive answer
on a very important question:**

What do you call them — lightning bugs, fireflies or June bugs?

— *From, Bugging Out*

**A Dear Bugging Out,
First, cheers to you for
knowing the difference between
important and not important.**

That I get to dedicate a morning to thinking about your question — thinking about *fireflies* — fills my soul with miniature flashing lights, not unlike the actual lights of the bugs in question.

As far as a definitive answer, I will not go there. As I am

not a bugatologist (they prefer entomologist) with a decade-long, hard-won Ph.D., but an advice columnist with nothing but an aging laptop and some deliciously aged boots, I am not as concerned with naming advice as with what the names mean.

To me, fireflies mean East Texas — my grandmother’s back porch that opened to a quarter acre of tall pines. In the summer months it was a gateway to bloom after bloom of, as she called them, *fireflies*. To call the bug anything different would be to turn away from the memory of how her Texas drawl collapsed the word “fire” into a staccato note that sounded like “far.” It’s to pretend that the world’s definition of a thing means more than what she passed down to me, which was likely passed down from her parents, or a sibling, or a friend who perhaps she ran in circles with on summer evenings, ready to make a “far-fly” collection, Mason jars in hand.

Others have their own stories, their own names. Of all the bugs I’ve encountered, fireflies — or whatever name you choose in the end — are about soul-stirring delight. It’s so easy for our adult selves to squeeze out those beliefs to make room for what is more exact, but less life-giving.

If you are so lucky as to see these bugs stirring this summer, Bugging Out, how about calling them by all three names, then waiting to see what sticks. Say one name, then wait, then say another. Miniature flashing lights will surround you, but when you *feel* the miniature flashing light inside, you’ll know you’ve found the one.

— *Love, Boots*
