When good bugs go bad.

All summer long, generations of tiny bugs of the Hemipteran family Anthocoridae are helpful. The adults are 1/8 inch or less and commonly referred to as pirate bugs or flower bugs. The adults and nymphs feed on insect eggs, thrips, aphids and other small soft bodied insects. One species, Orius insidiosus, a.k.a. minute pirate bug, a.k.a. insidious flower bug, has been shown to help control soybean aphid populations. They can be very abundant but are seldom noticed and good to have around.

Then, in late summer and early fall, they turn ugly. As vegetation starts to die and insect prey becomes scarce, winged adult minute pirate bugs begin to attack human flesh. The bites from their tiny, piercing-sucking mouthparts are painful and can raise itchy welts on those people sensitive to the saliva. The pirate bugs do not feed on human blood, flesh or transmit disease and the bites are probably in desperate hopes of finding something edible. Yes, that is my flesh with the developing red welt and frustrated pirate bug in the photo. Fortunately, the pirate bug attacks stop with cold weather and surviving females pirate bugs will once again be "good bugs" next spring.

We have a good population of two species of mosquitoes in parts of SW Minnesota now too! Happy trails.