

Seeing lightning bugs glowing at dusk isn't uncommon this time of year, but did you know that catching them could make you some money?

The Oak Ridge, Tenn.-based Firefly Project is asking for local residents to collect fireflies to be used for medical and industrial research. As part of the effort, the group will pay 50 cents per gram or about \$2 for every 100 lightning bugs collected.

Dwight Sullivan, who is an agent with the Firefly Project, said the ingredients involved in the bio-chemical reaction — which produces light in the bug's tail — are what is most important about the insect.

“For research purposes, they use the gene of the lightning bug as a genetic marker tag and they'll take it and couple it with a gene they are working on,” Sullivan said. “If they combine a gene that has to do with the enzyme with the one they want, then they can do the experiment and see how successful it was by how much light is produced.”

While other organisms like deep sea fish also have lights similar to fireflies, they are not as common or easy to catch, Sullivan said. Also, not all lightning bugs work.

“There are several species in Tennessee but only one or two are really prominent,” Sullivan said. “One of them doesn't work when they try to extract an enzyme from the tail, but fortunately the one that is easiest to catch is the right one.”

The correct type has a red head, black back and yellow tail, Sullivan said. It's also recommended that catchers use a net when gathering the insects, which come out at twilight.

“The season for lightning bugs typically begins in late May or early June and peaks around July 4,” he said. “Sometimes if it's real hot and dry you won't see them the further into July you get, but if the weather conditions are right they're out into August.”

Once caught, the bugs should be frozen immediately in order to preserve the enzyme they contain. They can be delivered to one of three locations in Gallatin, Lebanon and Goodlettsville on Tuesday, July 15.

Reach Josh Cross at 615-575-7115.

DROP-OFF LOCATIONS

One day only on Tuesday, July 15.

Gallatin: The Gallatin Area Chamber of Commerce, 118 W. Main St., from 4-4:30 p.m.

Goodlettsville: Fire Hall No. 1, 105 Long Hollow Pike, from 2:15-2:45 p.m.

Lebanon: Fire Hall No. 1, 209 E. Gay St., from 8:45-9:15 a.m.

- Reminder: Put an ice pack around the bugs when delivering them.

For more information, contact the Firefly Project call 562-536-3930 or email fireflyproject@yahoo.com.