

## 8 Effective Non-Chemical Ways to Repel Fleas and Ticks

While I only recommend using chemical flea&tick preventives sparingly, if at all, it doesn't mean you & your pet have to live with annoying, disease-transmitting pests. After this No. 1 rule to help fortify your pet's immune system, here are my nontoxic options for keeping pests away from your pet.

**Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker**

### STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- While I only recommend using chemical flea and tick preventives sparingly unless addressing an infestation, I do advise using a variety of natural methods to repel fleas and ticks on an ongoing basis during high risk months
- Feed your pet a balanced, species-appropriate fresh-food diet that will help keep his immune system functioning optimally
- Fleas are less likely to be attracted to a healthy pet, and in the case of ticks, a robust immune response will help fight off any tick-borne pathogens
- To make your home less hospitable to pests, vacuum often — including carpets, floors and furniture — and empty the vacuum canister immediately if fleas are present

Chemical flea and tick preventives are so overused, including on pets, that rivers and ponds are being polluted, leading to ecosystem disruption.<sup>1</sup> Beyond the environmental risks, consistent application of chemical flea and tick products to your pet may be putting his health in **jeopardy**.

That being said, no one wants a flea infestation in their home — and pests like ticks can transmit disease to you and your pets. External parasite exposure is different for every family, depending on geographic location, season and environment. Because most pets' lifestyles reflect that of their owners (primarily indoor owners keep their pets inside more and outdoor adventurers often bring their dogs), I recommend you do for your pets what you do for the rest of your family, in terms of managing external parasite risks.

Matching your animals' exposure to a customized, thoughtful nontoxic parasite prevention protocol means those heavy duty chemicals can be minimized or discontinued, unless you have an uncontrolled outbreak requiring aggressive treatment.

When your dog romps around outdoors, there's a good chance he's going to come in contact with a parasite or two, so you're going to need a variety of natural methods to repel fleas and ticks.

## What Are the Best Natural Flea and Tick Repellants?

There are many nontoxic options when it comes to keeping pests away from your pets. For starters, be sure to feed your pet a **balanced, species-appropriate fresh-food diet** that will help keep his immune system functioning optimally.

The Terrain Theory posits that when an individual's internal ecosystem is weakened, they are more susceptible to poor health, opening the door to disease, including parasite infestations.

In short, fleas are less likely to be attracted to a healthy pet, and in the case of ticks, a robust immune response will help fight off any tick-borne pathogens your pet is exposed to (this is why many dogs show they've been exposed to Lyme disease but are not positive; because their immune system did what it was supposed to do). Healthy food supports a healthy immune system. Kibble is quick, just like cereal, but a lifetime of cereal will not result in a thriving microbiome or immune system.

You can further bolster your pet's immune system by providing pure drinking water and limiting exposure to unnecessary vaccines and medications, environmental chemicals — including lawn chemicals — and electromagnetic fields. Tiny amounts of fresh garlic — about 1/4 teaspoon per 15 pounds of body weight daily — may also be given to dogs and cats to help prevent internal as well as external parasites.

But during flea and tick season, beginning a natural multimodal parasite prevention strategy early is the wisest way to keep any chemical application to a minimum. This includes:

- **Citrus juice** — Fleas dislike citrus, so try misting a little fresh-squeezed lemon, orange or grapefruit juice on your dog's fur, taking care to avoid his eyes. And remember lemon juice can lighten dark hair.
- **Take a bath** — Fleas do not hold on to your pet's hair, so a dip in a warm tub of water for five minutes will cause many fleas to drown in the water.

Bathing your dog regularly is also important, as fleas are less attracted to clean animals. Consider using a natural, pet-safe peppermint or neem shampoo for an added antiparasite kick.

After the bath, use a flea comb to remove any remaining fleas. Place your pet on a light-colored towel to catch any fleas that fall off and dip the comb into a bowl of soapy water after each swipe.

- **Clean your home thoroughly and regularly** — To make your home less hospitable to pests, vacuum often — including carpets, floors and furniture — and empty the vacuum canister immediately if fleas are present. Wash bed linens, pet bedding and throw rugs frequently as well.
- **Add natural predators** — Nematodes are a type of beneficial microscopic roundworm that eat flea larvae. You can find them at garden centers and pet stores.

Add them to your backyard and you'll likely notice a reduction in flea populations within two days. Ladybugs are another natural predator of fleas and can also be found at garden stores.

- **Use essential oils** — Geranium, lemongrass and other essential oils like neem and catnip oil may help deter mosquitoes, fleas, ticks and other pests from attacking your dog or cat.

Essential oils should be diluted prior to application. Never apply full strength essential oils to your pets unless instructed by your health care professional.

- **Consider protective clothing** — If you'll be spending time in an area where ticks are likely, such as a wooded or grassy area, consider putting a doggy t-shirt on your dog to help keep off ticks. You can even cut old socks and put them on your dog's legs (leg-warmer style) for added protection.

Do be sure, however, that the clothing is comfortable for your pet and does not cause her to overheat. After outdoor excursions it's important to use a flea comb on your animals and complete thorough body checks for potential unwanted tagalongs. Flea infestations and engorged ticks occur most often when daily parasite checks are skipped.

- **Use food-grade Diatomaceous Earth (DE)** — Apply a light dusting of food-grade DE on your carpets, bare floors and pet bedding, as well as down your pet's spine (avoid her head), to kill fleas.
- **Make your yard less hospitable to pests** — Keep your lawn mowed and clear brush, leaves, tall grass and weeds from your yard and areas your pet frequents.

Ensure stacked wood is kept off the ground and away from your house. After the growing season, clear perennial plants and other brush from your garden.

Buy beneficial nematodes (from home and garden stores or online) to treat the grass in your yard (they eat flea larvae).

## Nontoxic, DIY Pest Spray for Pets

Using natural deterrents every time you head into high-risk areas is another a commonsense strategy that reduces the need for ongoing chemical application during flea and tick season. You can make homemade pest deterrents to keep on hand in your refrigerator, then spritz your dog or cat before they go outdoors (don't spray their faces):

- **For dogs** — Mix 8 ounces of pure water with 4 ounces of organic, **unfiltered apple cider vinegar** and 20 drops of neem oil. If you live in an area with ticks, you can also add five drops of lemon, lemongrass, eucalyptus or geranium essential oil for added punch.
- **For cats** — Mix 8 ounces of pure water with 4 ounces of organic, unfiltered apple cider vinegar, plus 10 drops of neem oil and 10 drops of catnip oil.

## Do You Live in a High-Risk Area?

If you live in a high-risk area, you can often alternate chemical preventives with natural deterrents and detoxification to cut down on pesticide usage. And be especially vigilant about flea-combing your dog after every outdoor adventure.

In addition, I recommend screening for tick-borne diseases once a year, or every six months in high-risk areas, using an **Accuplex or 4DX screening test**. This screens for heartworm, Lyme disease and two strains each of ehrlichia and anaplasma. Even if you choose to use chemical flea and tick preventives, this test is necessary since pesticide resistance is a growing problem.

If you live in a tick-infested area and your pet tests positive on the SNAP 4Dx Plus or the Accuplex4, I recommend additional screening for Babesia exposure. Babesiosis is a disease caused by some tick bites, which can be serious. The best way to detect exposure to this parasite is with a PCR (polymerase chain reaction) test that checks for the presence of Babesia DNA.

Keep in mind that most tick-borne diseases take hours to be transmitted to your pet, so removing ticks soon after they attach may help prevent illness. This is why simply inspecting your dog for ticks regularly, especially after you've been to a high-risk area like a forest preserve, is one of the most important natural strategies you can use.

## Sources and References

<sup>1</sup> [Imperial College London, Grantham Institute Briefing Note No 15, March 2023](#)

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