

6 Natural Ways to Repel Fleas and Ticks

Surprisingly, there are all-natural, effective ways to help control biting insects in your yard and on your pet. One actually gobbles up flea larvae in your yard, with results seen within only two days. Another natural predator loves to consume fleas.

Analysis by [Dr. Karen Shaw Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Repelling fleas and ticks is important to prevent short- and long-term health problems, from uncomfortable itching to life-threatening chronic disease
- Natural flea and tick repellents include citrus juice and geranium oil
- Adding natural pest predators, like nematode worms, to your backyard will reduce pest populations
- Bathing your pet, using a flea comb and inspecting your pet for ticks are also important

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As temperatures rise and your pet spends her days happily sniffing out a new trail on your morning walk or rolling around in your backyard grass, she's a prime target for hungry fleas and ticks.

It's a subject many pet owners would rather not think about, but it's far better to be proactive in preventing such pest exposures than it is to find yourself with an infestation of fleas or a pet with a tick-borne illness.

This does not mean you need to douse your pet in chemical flea and tick preventatives. In fact, I typically discourage pet owners from applying harsh chemicals to their pets for this purpose.

Spot-on and similar pest-repellent products may lead to problems ranging from skin irritation to seizures and paralysis.

If you apply too much to a small dog — or apply a product meant for dogs to cats — the result can even be deadly. The other issue is that many pests are becoming resistant to these widely used chemicals, which means applying one is not a guarantee of safety.

One happy medium is to use natural methods to repel fleas and ticks from your dog, including the options, compiled by PetMD, below.¹

Natural Ways to Repel Fleas and Ticks

- **Citrus juice** — Fleas dislike citrus, so try sprinkling some fresh-squeezed lemon, **orange** or grapefruit juice on your dog's fur (being careful to avoid her 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 warm tub of water will cause many fleas to fall off into the water.

Bathing your dog regularly is also important, as fleas are less attracted to clean animals. Consider 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** — One of the key strategies to controlling fleas and ticks involves making your home less hospitable to such pests.

To do so, vacuum your home often (carpets, floors, furniture, etc.) and empty the vacuum canister immediately if fleas are present. Wash bed linens, pet bedding and throw rugs frequently.

- **Add natural predators** — Nematodes are a type of beneficial microscopic roundworm that eats 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.

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

It's More Than Just the 'Ick' Factor

If pests attach to your dog or cat, they can easily be carried indoors and infiltrate your home. A flea infestation or a tick on your wall is more than simply unpleasant, however, as such pests are capable of transmitting disease.

The biggest risk of ticks is not that they will take over your home, but their propensity for feeding on many different animals, from mice and deer to opossums.

They also like to take their time when they eat, feeding for long periods of time that makes them perfectly suited for acquiring and transmitting disease. It takes only one bite from a tick to transmit multiple tick-borne diseases, including:

- Lyme disease
- Rocky Mountain spotted fever
- Anaplasmosis
- Babesiosis
- Cytauxzoonosis

- Ehrlichiosis
- Hepatozoonosis
- Tularemia

Fleas, on the other hand, breed quickly and can be difficult to get under control once they find their way into your home. However, even one or two fleas can lead to uncomfortable itching if your dog has flea allergy dermatitis (FAD), which is sensitivity (allergy) to flea saliva (and is very common in dogs).

Aside from FAD, fleas can also transmit tapeworms, cause cat scratch disease and may even cause severe cases of anemia, especially in young animals. So taking steps to prevent both flea and tick bites is about more than just removing the “ick” factor; it’s a health issue.

Don’t Give Your Pet Antibiotics After a Tick Bite Before Doing This

If you find a tick on your pet, she may have been exposed to tick-borne pathogens, but exposure is not the same thing as infection. This is an important distinction, because many veterinarians unnecessarily prescribe antibiotics when a dog’s blood shows exposure has occurred.

Up to 90% of dogs may have exposure to these tick-borne pathogens, but most dogs' immune systems fight off these infections all on their own. If your pet tests positive for exposure, it's important to follow up with the Quantitative C6 (QC6) test, which differentiates exposure from infection.

I see dozens of dogs each year unnecessarily treated with extensive antibiotic therapy because their veterinarian panicked after seeing a positive exposure. Please don't let your vet do this!

Another important point is that most tick-borne diseases take many hours to be transmitted to your pets, so removing ticks soon after they attach may help prevent illness. This is why it’s so important to inspect your dog for ticks regularly, especially after you’ve been to a high-risk area like a forest preserve.

If You Live in an Area With Ticks, Test Your Pet for Tick-Borne Pathogens Every 6 Months

In the case of tick-borne disease, early treatment is critical to prevent chronic disease. If you live in a tick-endemic area or know your pet tends to get bit by multiple ticks each year, I recommended testing for infection every six months. The simplest way to do this is to ask your vet to replace the standard heartworm test with a more comprehensive annual blood test that identifies several tick-borne potential pathogens long before dogs show symptoms.

I recommend the SNAP 4Dx Plus and the Accuplex4 tests, which screen for heartworm, Lyme disease, and two strains each of ehrlichia and anaplasma, for dogs in tick-endemic areas.

Completing this simple blood test every six to 12 months is the best way to avoid unnecessary chemical application, identify infections before chronic disease occurs and prevent overlooking cases of dogs infected because of pesticide resistance (a growing problem in veterinary medicine).

I also recommend that pets living in tick-infested areas who test positive on the SNAP 4Dx Plus or the Accuplex4 also be screened for Babesia exposure. 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.

A Healthy Pet Is the Best Pest Preventive There Is

It's extremely important to feed your pet a balanced, species-appropriate fresh-food diet that will help keep her immune system functioning optimally. Fleas are not 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.

You can further bolster your pet's immune system by providing pure drinking water and limiting her exposure to unnecessary vaccines and medications, environmental chemicals (including lawn chemicals) and electromagnetic fields (EMFs). Finally, the following tips will further help to protect your pet from pests naturally:

- Tiny amounts of fresh garlic may be given to dogs and cats to help prevent internal as well as external parasites
- Apply a light dusting of food-grade diatomaceous earth (DE) on your carpets, bare floors, and pet bedding, as well as down your pet's spine (avoid her head), to kill fleas
- Keep your lawn mowed and clear brush, leaves, tall grass and weeds from your yard and areas your pet frequents
- Keep stacked wood off the ground and away from your house
- After the growing season, clear perennial plants and other brush from your garden

Sources and References

[PetMD](#)

¹ [PetMD](#)
