

## Forget Harsh Chemicals – These Oils Deter Pests Like Armor

With tick-borne diseases set to soar this year, you must be on the alert, especially over the summer months. Forget DEET though. It's toxic and often ineffective. Instead, mix this up. Your pet will love you for it, and you'll enjoy the delightful scent too.

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

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### STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- This is a recap of my second Facebook Live session, and “spring has sprung” topics (fleas, ticks, seasonal allergies) are the focus
- I discuss why I don't recommend brewer's yeast or garlic pills to control pests, and ways to protect your pet from external parasites without loading up on chemical preventives
- I also share my special recipes for all-natural pest deterrent sprays for dogs and cats, and my secret weapon for providing tremendous relief to dogs with red, itchy, irritated paws
- Other springtime topics discussed include supplements for pets with seasonal allergies, dietary considerations and the importance of checking for ticks and tick-borne disease

**Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published May 14, 2017.**

Welcome, Facebook family, to my second Facebook Live presentation. Today I want to cover some really important topics for spring, namely, fleas, ticks and allergies.

The first thing I tell every pet parent about fleas, ticks and other external parasites is they are attracted to certain animals, but not so much to others, depending on factors like nutritional status, skin pH, gut microbiome and overall vitality.

There are many things that impact a pet's immune system response and ability to deal with external parasites.

For example, I have clients who have lots of cats or do cat rescues, and even though the kitties are living in a relatively small space, there are one or two who may be infested with fleas, while the others in the group only attract the random flea or two.

So what we want to do is focus on keeping dogs and cats as vibrantly healthy on the inside as possible, because that will make them less attractive and less hospitable to external parasites.

I can't stress enough the importance of diet when it comes to your pet's immune system health.

The more fresh, living, whole, unadulterated foods you can feed — the more species-appropriate nutrition you can offer — the better able your pet will be to absorb and process the nutrients needed for a functional, healthy immune system.

## Just Say No to Brewer's Yeast

Some pet parents think or have been told brewer's yeast and garlic pills will help bolster their dog's or cat's immune system and repel fleas and ticks. I'm not a big fan of either for a variety of reasons.

Brewer's yeast is allergenic, and given the number of pets suffering with allergies these days, I never recommend any substance or food known to be allergenic. However, brewer's yeast is a great source of B vitamins, which is helpful in repelling pests.

Unfortunately, most B vitamin supplements in the U.S. are imported. I don't like imported or synthetic B vitamins. Instead, I'd like you to think about food sources that are rich in the B vitamins, for example, fresh, whole, unadulterated meats, which are perfect for dogs and cats, who are **carnivores** (meat eaters).

## Also Say No to Garlic Pills. Do This Instead

I'm also not a fan of garlic supplements. Each fresh clove of garlic contains two inactive compounds, alliin and alliinase, which convert to allicin, an active medicinal compound, when the clove is cut, crushed or chopped.

The medicinal components of allicin in fresh garlic only last for about eight hours, so the jar of garlic you buy at the grocery store no longer contains the wonderful anticancer, antiparasitic, antibacterial and antiviral properties of freshly chopped garlic. All those amazing properties are long gone, and what is left is an aromatic spice.

So my recommendation is to add freshly chopped or crushed garlic to your pet's diet. Now, some of you are saying to yourselves, "But Dr. Becker, garlic is toxic to pets!"

Almost two decades ago I came across a report, "Hematologic Changes Associated with Administration of Garlic Extract in Dogs." The report proves that only a tremendous amount of garlic, for example, 5 grams per kilogram of dogs, which is about eight to 12 cloves of garlic for an 8 to 10 pound dog, is dangerous.

You'd never give that much garlic to your dog, and your dog probably wouldn't eat it if you did. But here's what's interesting in the report. Even at extremely high levels, garlic did not cause hemolytic anemia in dogs or cats. All that to say, you can give quite a bit of garlic to dogs and cats and not worry about hemolytic anemia.

So my recommendation is to add medicinal quantities of freshly chopped garlic to your pet's food on a daily basis during flea and tick season. That's about 1/4 teaspoon of for every 15 pounds of dog. A dog under 15 pounds would get about 1/8th teaspoon. For kitties, I'd do about 1/16th teaspoon.

This is a safe, natural way to offer your pet parasite protection. The fresh garlic will be absorbed into your pet's gastrointestinal (GI) tract and secreted through the skin, making him a very unpalatable host for external parasites.

## Natural Deterrents for External Parasites

Depending on where you live, you either have seasonal pests, or they're a problem year-round. There are some situations in which natural pest repellents just don't get the job done.

For example, when I'm hiking in the woods with my dogs here in the Chicago area, even though we all have robust immune systems, we wind up with ticks — not because we're unhealthy, but because deep in the woods, there are just so many ticks they can't be entirely avoided.

If you live in an area like Florida where fleas are a problem, you may have no choice but to use topical chemical pest products on your pet. In this case, I recommend regular detoxing with a natural agent like milk thistle to support your pet's liver while it's dealing with chemical pest control products.

Other suggestions are to try to use chemical spot-on products every other month rather than every month. You can also experiment by replacing your dog's traditional pesticide collar with an essential oil collar. Try to use safer, more natural pest deterrents during times when your dog will be hanging around your home and immediate neighborhood.

Then if you go hiking in the woods, or you go on a camping trip where ticks are abundant, you can switch to something stronger. A good rule of thumb: when the parasite risk is low, keep chemical deterrents to a minimum. When the risk is higher, go for the more potent stuff to keep your pet safe.

## Pest Deterrents Versus Preventives

I like to think of deterrents as all-natural, and preventives as the chemical pesticides conventional veterinarians recommend. Pest deterrents don't cause cancer, seizures or liver toxicosis. Pest preventives are pesticides, which means they're toxins. Sometimes they're necessary, but it's important to realize they can have significant side effects.

Preventives are supposed to prevent ticks and fleas. Deterrents reduce the likelihood of getting fleas and ticks, but they're not a guarantee. I mention this because many people tend to think natural flea and tick products will prevent all pests, and that's not the case. Actually, regardless of what product you use, you should be checking your pet and yourself frequently if you're in a tick endemic area.

Actually, if I had to choose between a flea infestation and ticks, I'd pick the fleas. Fleas are gross and disgusting, but the worst-case scenario from fleas is something like a tapeworm infection. Ticks, on the other hand, can spread life-threatening infections.

## All-Natural Homemade Pest Deterrent for Dogs

You can actually make an all-natural pest deterrent for your dog very easily at home. It will help him avoid a good percentage of the pests he encounters, though not all of them. The recipe: mix 8 ounces of pure water with 4 ounces of organic, unfiltered **apple cider vinegar** and 10 drops of neem oil.

Neem oil is not an essential oil. It's an expelled or pressed oil, and it's safe for cats (I have a pest deterrent recipe for kitties I'll give you in a second). Neem oil is effective because fleas and ticks hate it. It's also great for animals who are very sensitive to smells. Catnip oil can also be used as a pest deterrent, since it has been proven to be as effective as diethyltoluamide (DEET), the mosquito and tick spray humans use that has a number of toxic side effects.

If you want to add some extra punch to your dog's pest recipe, go with five drops of lemon, lemongrass, eucalyptus or geranium oil. I use geranium oil quite a bit because I find it very effective. In fact, I use it in my Dr. Mercola natural flea and tick products. If you have a dog who comes in contact with ticks, adding the extra punch of one of the essential oils I listed can be very beneficial.

You can store your homemade pest deterrent in the fridge, which is what I do. Before my dogs head out in the morning, I mist them with it, being careful to avoid their eyes. The active ingredients, especially the oils in the recipe, dissipate in about four hours, so you may need to reapply it several times throughout the day.

## **All-Natural Homemade Pest Deterrent for Cats**

My recipe for cats is very similar to the one for dogs. 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. Cats and essential oils can be tricky, so we want to leave essential oils out of the kitty recipe.

Neither neem nor catnip oil are truly essential oils — they're distillates, so we're safe using those. Catnip oil works to deter mosquitoes as well. Cats aren't prone to heartworm, which is a mosquito-borne disease, but dogs are. So those are two easy, all-natural recipes you can use to deter pests and as a bonus, they also make your dog or cat smell wonderful! You can use them during flea season, tick season and all summer long, and feel good that you're not using pesticides on your pet.

## **Don't Forget Those All-Important Tick Checks!**

If you spend a lot of time outdoors like I do, it's important to check your pet and yourself for ticks every night during tick season. Don't forget to check around your dog's eyes, the base of the ears and tail and between the toes.

Use a flea and tick comb to naturally exfoliate your pet's skin while pulling off or exposing pests. I also just saw a great suggestion to use a lint roller as soon as your pet comes indoors to grab any ticks that are on top of the coat, before they burrow in and attach to the skin. Bottom line: absolutely nothing takes the place of physically checking for ticks.

## **Blood Tests for Tick-Borne Disease**

Many people mistakenly assume that if their dog receives the Lyme disease vaccine, ticks won't attach. The fact is your dog is susceptible to tick bites with or without the Lyme vaccine. You still have to take action to prevent external parasites from attaching to your pet.

I'm not a fan of the Lyme vaccine because it's adjuvanted (meaning it's sort of "turbocharged") and there have been substantial adverse reactions reported. I recommend skipping the vaccine and instead doing common sense preventive steps like manual flea and tick checks.

Also, rather than a traditional heartworm test every spring, I strongly encourage everyone in tick-endemic areas to do either a 4Dx test through IDEXX, or an Accuplex through ANTECH, which are the two big national veterinary labs.

These blood tests check not only for heartworm, but also for exposure to tick-borne diseases, which are epidemic in North America, and I'm not exaggerating. I started running these tests on my own dogs back in 2011. We lived on 40 acres deep in the woods and while my dogs were vibrantly healthy, they had big time tick exposure.

I decided to run a 4Dx and was stunned to discover that all five dogs were positive for tick-borne disease. I figured if my dogs were positive, then other people's dogs were, too. I started recommending replacing the traditional heartworm test with a 4Dx. It costs a bit more, but it's well worth it.

Because I'm a proactive veterinarian, since two of my five were actually infected (not just exposed), I took action. (The other three had immune system responses that fought off infection.) I was able to treat them with an all-natural protocol that cleared their infections.

## Relieving Your Pet's Itchy Parts During Allergy Season

It's such a shame that the glorious season of spring means red, swollen, very itchy, irritated paws for so many dogs. It signals that **seasonal allergies** have arrived, and your pet is in for several weeks of misery.

There are only two types of allergies — food allergies and environmental allergies. If your dog has been itchy all winter, even when you were under 3 feet of snow, she probably has food sensitivities. Talk to your veterinarian, and do a search here at Healthy Pets for my articles and videos on food allergies.

Allergies that occur seasonally and cause those red, swollen, itchy paws, are environmental. The number one common sense strategy to help your dog is to rinse his paws each time he's been outside. It's an all-natural technique known by the fancy term "irrigation therapy."

Irrigation therapy can remove over 50% of the allergens stuck on your dog's paws, and therefore reduce that miserable itch by 50%. It's side effect-free, there's no cost involved and it can provide substantial relief without drugs. It just takes a few extra minutes a day, and a bit of patience encouraging your dog to stand in his foot bath for a good soaking.

Likewise, if your dog is itchy from head to toe, do irrigation therapy on his whole body. Lather him up from his collar backwards to his tail. Take a warm wet washcloth to his face every day. You can put some colloidal silver on the washcloth to reduce yeast growth around his eyes and ears. Lather him up once a week and rinse him off, and you're manually removing billions of allergens from his miserably itchy skin.

Set up your footbath in a coffee can or a one of those Rubbermaid sweater tubs like I use. You can put a splash of apple cider vinegar in the water to naturally disinfect the paws and kill off **yeast**. If your dog has skin sores or you think he might have a skin infection, you can use a splash of Betadine instead.

Betadine is povidone iodine. It's an all-natural organic iodine solution. You can buy it just about anywhere. Add it until the water in the footbath is the color of iced tea. It's a great natural antibacterial agent that kills staphs, strep, E. coli and other bacteria.

## Supplements for Seasonal Allergies

If you know your pet has seasonal allergies that kick into high gear around May 1, start a proactive protocol on April 1. I recommend quercetin, which is an all-natural plant extract I call "nature's Benadryl." I also recommend bromelain, which is pineapple enzyme and is a natural anti-inflammatory. Quercetin plus bromelain is a great one-two punch for providing drug-free seasonal allergy relief.

If you start the protocol before your dog has histamine wind-up, which means before he starts getting red and itchy, you can provide him tremendous relief. By the time everything's in bloom, your dog's immune response will be more balanced, which means fewer symptoms.

I actually created a blend of all my favorite seasonal herbs into one product because I got tired of recommending my laundry list of ingredients: quercetin, bromelain, plant sterols, vitamin C, bee pollen, stinging nettle, etc. Another of my favorite herbs is cat's claw, which is South America's most prescribed herb for allergies.

There are also homeopathic remedies and traditional Chinese herbals that work for allergies, but you'll need to work with someone who's trained at prescribing and dosing.

Also consider local honey, which should be available at your local health food store or farmer's market. Give about 1/2 teaspoon per 15 pounds of body weight to your pet. You're actually giving a small amount of local allergens in the form of honey to help your pet's body build up an immunologic tolerance.

It doesn't work instantly, and it doesn't work for everyone. You'll need to do it season after season, but it's something that you can certainly consider to provide longer-term relief for your pet. The goal is to work at strengthening your pet's immune system this summer, so that next summer is a little better, and a little better than that two years from now, and so on.

If you're frustrated with the guidance and recommendations of your own veterinarian to treat your pet's allergies, I encourage you to visit [AHVMA.org](http://AHVMA.org) and try to find an integrative vet nearby.

It's not that integrative and holistic vets are opposed to using drugs when they're really needed. But we always try to start with the least toxic options to encourage your pet's body to heal itself. We believe the goal of a healer is to unlock the healing potential within the body.

## Allergic Pets and Starchy Diets

Your pet's diet is the foundation for both good health and healing from disease. Even when it comes to fleas, ticks and allergies, it's extremely important to think about the food you're feeding your animal companion.

There are anti-inflammatory diets and there are pro-inflammatory diets. If you're feeding any type of kibble, you're feeding your pet starch. If you have a dog with no allergies, or diabetes, or cancer and who is thriving, you may not see any health issues from feeding kibble.

However, my practice is full of sick animals with all sorts of medical conditions that are exacerbated by starch. My issue isn't as much about dry food as it is starch. Dogs and cats have no biological requirement for corn, wheat, rice, soy or potato. They have no requirement for complex carbohydrates.

They do need fiber, but not starch. Starch breaks down into sugar. Sugar feeds yeast and inflammatory processes within your pet's body. If your pet has allergies, you need to eliminate the starch in her diet.

Carbohydrate content isn't listed on pet food labels ([find out how to calculate it here](#)). I suspect it isn't listed because pet food companies don't want you to freak out when you see how much starch you're feeding. If you can transition your pet to a low-starch diet (below 10%), I promise your allergic pet will feel better.

## Audience Q&A

### **Stephanie asks, "Are the recipes [the pest deterrent recipes I discussed earlier] only for fleas and ticks?"**

My answer: No, the recipes can help with other parasites, sandflies, for example. External parasites in general don't like neem or catnip or geranium oil. These bugs have receptors that sense the presence of appropriate hosts nearby. Apple cider vinegar and the oils in my recipes confuse the parasites' receptors and the pests are less likely to drop onto or land on your pet.

### **Hala asks, "Should you dry the paws after foot soaks?"**

My answer: Yes. You can pat them dry with a towel — just don't rinse the solution off. Leaving a bit of vinegar residue will allow it to continue to fight staph and yeast for several hours. It also discourages your dog from lick-lick-licking those feet all day and all night.

### **Omer asks, "How about Dr. Mercola's honey for our puppy?"**

My answer: Great idea! Just don't go hog wild with any honey for your pet. A half-teaspoon for a 15-pound dog is about right — a bit more for a larger dog, and a bit less for a tiny dog. Too much can make your dog hyperglycemic and we definitely don't want that. A little bit goes a long way.

### **Toni asks, "What about food allergies in cats?"**

My answer: I'm just going to touch on this briefly. I'll do a longer discussion of food allergies in the future. Kitties with food allergies can have inflammatory bowel disease-like (IBD) symptoms, vomiting in particular, plus diarrhea, constipation, chronic hairballs, coughing, etc.

GI symptoms are extremely common in cats with food allergies, but so is chronic eye discharge. The symptoms tend to be very diverse. If you have a kitty with persistent symptoms, particularly skin and coat or GI symptoms, she could be reacting to some component of her food.

If you just want to know if the problem is a protein source like chicken or seafood, a simple and quick test you can do is the NutriScan saliva test developed by Dr. Jean Dodds. You submit the sample yourself and the test results will tell you what foods to avoid and which are safe for your pet.

## Thanks Again for Joining Me!

Thank you all for joining me! I hope the topics I've covered have been helpful. I'm already planning my next Facebook Live session, so submit your topics and questions on my **Facebook** page, and I'll see you next month!

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