

Flea Control - the Natural Way

http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/4013/natural_flea_control_for_cats_and_dogs.html

Is your cat or dog constantly itching and scratching due to flea infestation? Are the annoying little insects finding their way from Rover and Fluffy into your carpets, or worse, onto *your* skin? Before you run out and another round of flea-killing toxic chemicals, you might want to consider some less harmful natural alternatives. Synthetic pesticides may do the job, but can be poisonous to pets (and the children who play with them) as well as to the fleas they are intended to kill. The chemicals can be absorbed into the pet's (or child's) skin, and in turn, into the bloodstream. The most commonly used synthetic flea killers can cause convulsions and respiratory problems, and long-term treatment can even result in kidney failure in your pets. These are serious risks – but they can be avoided by employing some natural flea-control measures. The first step is to *know your enemy*. Fleas can be a major nuisance, and can be quite difficult to get rid of – they cannot even be killed by freezing temperatures. Their legs are so powerful that they can jump nine inches into the air – making pet-to-pet or floor-to-pet leaps all too easy. Fleas feed on the blood of your cats and dogs, but they spend most of their time away from your animals, laying their eggs in dark places in your house (such as floor cracks) - which is why your first line of defense is in and around your home. There is a fairly new flea control method available for use in your yard - it is a spray made from freeze dried worms or **nematodes** which are natural flea predators. The worms are reconstituted and sprayed in outdoor areas around your home. A popular brand name is Interrupt, which can be purchased from many veterinarians. [You can purchase nematodes online, or at some pet and garden stores. Place them in moist, shady spots near your house; neither fleas nor nematodes survive in the hot sun. A lawn sprayer is commonly used for application, and within 24 hours the resident flea population is reduced up to 80% depending on area sprayed. As nematodes multiply rapidly, you have only to introduce a small initial number to have residual benefits. Cold winter weather will significantly reduce the population of nematodes in the soil. In most cases, nematodes will become dormant during cold weather, and any survivors would be few in number to provide adequate insect control the following spring.]

Another outdoor flea repellent is **diatomaceous earth** (a kind of fossilized algae). It clings to the flea's shell and eventually penetrates the coating, causing it to die of dehydration. (Look for food grade diatomaceous earth, not the 'glassified' type used in swimming pool filters.) It can be spread around your yard with a garden spreader, and can also be rubbed into your pet's fur and sprinkled on his bedding. Special attention should be given to areas inside the home as well - sprinkled around baseboards, under furniture, in cracks, and hard-to-reach areas. Your pet's bedding should be washed often, and tumbled dry in a hot dryer to kill fleas. It is important to vacuum floors often, paying special attention to the dark, damp areas where fleas love to lay eggs.

Remember to dispose of the vacuum bag immediately, otherwise eggs can hatch and re-infect your home. **Boric acid powder** can be sprinkled onto clean carpets to keep fleas at bay (but test a small area of your carpet first, to make sure it is colorfast). Boric acid compounds are available commercially, specifically for flea control purposes. There are natural treatments which can be applied directly to your pet's coat, without any chemical side effects. In addition to the diatomaceous earth mentioned above, a mixture of **ground cloves and eucalyptus oil** may help to ward off fleas. Citronella, wormwood, cedar and rosemary are some other alternatives, many of which can be found in products sold at health food stores. Citrus oil can also be of help – brush it into your pet's fur to help it penetrate the skin. One thing to remember – after treating your pet's coat, keep him outside for a few hours immediately afterward, to prevent the departing fleas from infesting your home! Frequent bathing and grooming of your pet will keep fleas away as well. You can find natural flea shampoos with some of the ingredients mentioned above at natural food stores. A **lemon rinse** after the bath is a helpful measure, leaving a citrus odor which fleas dislike. To make a rinse: Cut up a few lemons (6), cover them with boiling water (1qrt), and let the mixture steep overnight. After removing the pulp, the lemon water can be brushed into your pet's coat and allowed to air dry. Between baths, frequent use of a flea comb can be quite helpful. [Spread a little petroleum jelly on the comb so fleas 'stick' better.] An often-overlooked flea prevention method is your pet's diet. The addition of **garlic** (found to be **toxic to cats!**) in your dog's food [1 fresh, crushed section - not the whole clove - per every 30 lbs. into dog food] will create an odor on his skin, which fleas dislike, but is unnoticeable to humans. Garlic can be purchased in pill form from health food stores, or you can use the real thing. Another useful dietary supplement is **chelated zinc**. Daily dosages should be around 10 mg for cats and small dogs, and 20 mg for large dogs.

It's important to remember that your pet's overall health will determine how susceptible to flea infestation he is. A healthy cat or dog will not attract fleas as easily as a sick or weak one. Feeding your pet a high quality food can make a difference, as well as making sure he gets enough exercise on a daily basis. This, along with the

preventative measures above, can help keep flea infestations under control without the use of toxic chemicals – ensuring a happier pet, and a happier pet owner.

Handling a Flea Emergency

If your home is heavily infested with fleas, take these steps to get the situation under control.

Inside the Home

1. Locate heavily infested areas and concentrate efforts on these areas.
2. Wash throw rugs and the pet's bedding.
3. Vacuum upholstered furniture. Remove and vacuum under cushions and in cracks and crevices of furniture.
4. Vacuum carpets, especially beneath furniture and in areas frequented by pets. Use a hand sprayer to treat all carpets with an insecticide that contains an insect growth regulator.
5. Allow carpet to dry and vacuum a second time to remove additional fleas that were induced to emerge.
6. Continue to vacuum for 10 days to 2 weeks to kill adult fleas that continue to emerge from pupal cocoons.

On the Pet

1. Use a spot-on treatment, which can be purchased in pet stores or from vets, or a systemic oral treatment, which is available from vets only.

Outside the Home

1. Sprays are only necessary outdoors if you detect lots of fleas.
2. Locate and remove debris in heavily infested areas, especially where pets rest. Concentrate treatment in these areas with a spray containing a residual insecticide and the insect growth regulator pyriproxyfen. Open areas to

Information gathered from various sources:

~ For minor flea infestations, another recommendation involves washing your pet with a gentle shampoo, followed by a thorough rinse, then spraying on **unpasteurized apple cider vinegar** diluted with an equal amount of warm water. Allow the pet to drip or shake dry. The fleas will drown in the soapy shampoo water and the vinegar rinse will acidify your pet's skin making it very unattractive to other fleas and ticks. For dry itchy skin, hot spots, or skin infections you can bathe your pet in warm water then rinse him or her with a solution of 1 part UACV to 3 parts water. This vinegar rinse will also leave their coats soft and shiny.

~ You can trap fleas by placing a dish of soapy water under a night light near where your pet sleeps. Fleas are attracted to warm light and will drown in the soapy water. This works for adult fleas only, but with diligence, can be effective reducing the flea population. Fleas already residing on your pet aren't likely to leave, so you will still need to flea comb and/or bathe them in a mild shampoo (even a baby shampoo will work as fleas don't survive well in soapy water).

If the idea of keeping a soapy water dish near your pet is not attractive, plug-in flea traps are available. These electric traps are very effective. (They seem to also work well for ants, as we have noticed in our personal experience.)

~ Other natural ingredients known to cause allergic reactions or have toxic effects in some animals include Tea Tree (*Melaleuca alternifolia*) oil and Pennyroyal oil.

~ Flea Repellent - cut 6 lemons in half, boil in a quart of water, steep several hours or overnight, strain the pulp, then put solution into a spray bottle. Spritz your pet's fur, taking care not to spray near the eyes. Don't spray anything in a dog's face; apply spray to the hand and then rub it on the fur.

~ Avoid products containing any of these active ingredients: chlorpyrifos, dichlorvos, phosmet, naled, tetrachlorvinphos, diazinon, and malathion. Avoid products with carbamates by looking for the chemical names carbaryl and propoxur on the label.

~ Relatively newer topical products, available through veterinarians, that are insecticides designed to have fewer toxic effects on the nervous systems of mammals: imidacloprid (Advantage), fipronil (Frontline, Top Spot), and selamectin (Revolution).

~ Flies? - Pyrethrin-based sprays and ointments are relatively safe and effective.

~ Some websites to check out:

www.preciouspets.org/fleafree.htm

www.greenpet.com.au/article_fleas.php

www.VeterinaryPartner.com

<http://www.hsus.org> (Human Society of the United States)

http://www.eartheasy.com/live_natpest_control.htm

<http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7419.html> (University of California)

A few facts about fleas:

- Fleas are similar to cockroaches in that they adapt to their environment. They become stronger and more immune to the popular commercial flea control chemicals with each generation.
- Most of the fleas are living in your pet's environment, rather than in its fur. Every flea found on your pet may mean that there approximately 30 more living in your home.
- A single flea can lay as many as 60 eggs per day. The lifespan of a flea is about 90 days, but the hibernating cocoon can survive up to year without feeding.

Toxic products masquerading as "natural":

Even if all the ingredients in a flea repellent product are "natural", this does not ensure that they won't be toxic to your pet. For instance, d'Limonene, which is derived from citrus peels and found in many natural anti-flea products, can be highly toxic to cats. Herbal flea collars, though they don't contain the poisons that conventional flea collars do, come with the same warning: do not let children play with the collar. If it's not good for your child, why would it be good for your pet?

It is advisable to read product labels carefully. For example, one line of supposedly natural flea sprays and dips contains "all natural synthetic Pyrethrin." Pyrethrins are insecticides derived from the African chrysanthemum (Pyrethrum). Pyrethroids are synthetic derivatives of pyrethrins. Both are commonly used in conventional preparations which make the product sound innocent because it's derived from a flower. But pyrethrins alone can be toxic to the animal and pyrethroids expose your animal to more chemicals.

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Cat owners take special note: Cats should not be given any essential oils, period.

The use of essential oils with cats is a potentially volatile combination. Cats do not efficiently metabolize essential oils and their use can lead to symptoms of toxicity. In addition to essential oils, cats have known metabolic sensitivities to certain herbal preparations and allopathic medications. Because the cat's body does not efficiently excrete essential oils, they can build up to toxic levels. Symptoms of toxicity include vomiting, dizziness, clumsiness, lack of appetite, lack of energy and shock. In addition, cats have very thin, delicate skin. Essential oils are absorbed rapidly into their skin and enter the bloodstream, overwhelming their systems. Cats dislike strong odors and generally keep away from strong scents -- even highly diluted essential oils.

Some people find that they can use essential oils on their cats with no obvious adverse effects. Although one or more applications of an essential oil product or blend may not cause immediate harm, the effects of essential oils can be cumulative and manifest themselves at a later date in the form of toxicity for which owners and vets often can find no attributable cause. (source: aromaleigh.com)