

Holistic Animal Care

WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT FLEA CONTROL IN DOGS AND CATS?

by Dr. Anna Maria Gardner MA Vet.MB MRCVS

We are all enjoying the beautiful spring weather and the signs of summer ahead of us, but this is not always good news for our animal friends. The climate in Texas seems to be perfect for fleas and ticks and the skin problems and irritations that go along with these irritating, but well designed little monsters! Contrary to popular belief, even freezing does not destroy the flea, and both fleas and ticks will survive the winter, ready to plague us again when the warmer weather arrives. The first thing that we can do is to keep our animals as healthy as possible. Fleas and ticks are parasites and live in a balance with their animal hosts. It is true that a healthy pet does not seem to attract as many fleas and ticks as one in poor health and debilitated condition. The natural diet I suggested in last month's edition will go a long way in helping to raise your animals' resistance to both fleas and ticks, and to increase their overall level of health.

Further specific measures that can be taken involve repelling the fleas and ticks from your animal, and the best natural repellents are brewers yeast and garlic added to the food; this can be most conveniently added in the form of pills, available from health stores or some veterinarians. There is a commercially available formulation, called FleaStopper. I have found this to be very effective, and also to be an excellent multivitamin supplement and conditioner. Certain flower essences, and already prepared combinations, especially garlic, can also help in the flea control, if given regularly. The new, much publicized flea pill program may be helpful in severe cases, but I much prefer a more natural and holistic approach to flea control. As far as heartworm, the measures taken above will also help repel the mosquito, which transmits the heartworm to the dog, but I do also recommend the use of heartworm preventative in Texas, and prefer the monthly pill. There is also a homeopathic nosode to help control and prevent heartworm, in certain cases, which may be worth considering.

Last, but by no means least, there is the question of environmental control. Both fleas and ticks live off the animal most of the time; and it is therefore essential to control the environment in addition to your pet. Natural methods are available and are preferable to the use of harsh and toxic chemicals. commercial companies often use formulations of Boric Acid, and this is effective; many companies even offer a year-long guarantee in addition. This is also available for you to use yourself, thought test an area of carpeting for color fastness, and make sure you are not sensitive to the fine powder. I have found this to be most effective. Diatomaceous earth will also help control fleas and ticks in the environment, but can be messy to use, however, it does help. The best and most natural thing to use in your yard is a relatively new concept based on biological control. A small worm or nematode that is a natural predator for the flea eggs and larvae is freeze dried and then reconstituted and sprayed on the yard to combat the flea population. The brand I have used is called Interrupt and is available from many veterinarians.

Regular grooming with a small flea and tick comb is extremely beneficial, and also good for the skin and coat. And, it is important to remove ticks in this manner as soon as you find them, as they can carry several serious diseases, such as Lyme Disease, which is also transmitted to people. For this reason, try not to come into contact with the tick itself, and use gloves to remove and handle ticks. It may be helpful to clip the hair coat short in heavily infested animals to try and control the problem. To get rid of fleas and ticks already on the animal, natural herbal preparations and shampoos are available, often containing d-limonene, from citrus extracts, or herbs and essential oils such as citronella, eucalyptus and cedar. I personally think it is better to wash your pet every 2 weeks or so, rather than leave a herbal flea collar on all the time; and I do not recommend chemical flea collars, which continually release a small amount of toxins.

I hope this brief guide to natural flea control helps you this summer with your devoted feline and canine friends. The worst scenario is when an animal is allergic to fleas or ticks and then treatment is also necessary; homeopathic remedies can be of great benefit here.

To learn more about Dr. Anna Maria Gardner MA Vet.MB MRCVS visit www.petsynergy.com.