

Flea and tick control

Early spring is the season when flea and tick population begins to surge. Since these critters multiply and spread rapidly and can become the vectors of diseases, they should not be taken lightly. There are numerous flea and tick products in the market today: spot-on, spray, collars, shampoos, powders and pills. Some can be bought over-the-counter and some through veterinarians. Most of these products are made with pesticides and IGRs (insect growth regulators). Extreme care should be taken if pesticides are used. In November 2000, the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) released a report called "Poisons on Pets: Health Hazards from Flea and Tick Products". The report demonstrated a link between chemicals commonly used in flea and tick products and serious health problems. Two groups of pesticides: organophosphates (OPs) and carbamates are particularly toxic. They can harm the nervous system of both humans and pets. Children and cats are particularly vulnerable. If you would like to use chemical products on your pets, certain precautions should be followed:

- 1) avoid pesticides containing OPs and carbamates (any products with the following chemicals as active ingredients: chlorpyrifos, dichlorvos, phosmet, naled, tetrachlorvinphos, diazinon, malathion, carbaryl or propoxur) ;
- 2) consult your veterinarian before you apply the products;
- 3) never apply chemical pesticides on very young, elderly, pregnant, lactating or sick animals;
- 4) use IGRs which do not kill adult fleas but prevent the next generation of fleas. The common ones are Program®, Sentinel® and Precur®;
- 5) use newer pesticides that are less toxic such as Advantage® and Frontline®;
- 6) follow the instructions carefully, and report any adverse effects to your vet.

If you do not wish to use chemicals, there are also less toxic alternatives:

- 1) use flea comb to comb your pet, vacuum frequently and dispose the vacuum bags immediately after use;

- 2) use flea and tick repellents made with essential oils;
- 3) feeding brewer yeast and garlic to your pets helps to repel fleas;
- 4) use borate crystals or boric acid to control flea larvae in the carpet;
- 5) apply garlic spray to repel fleas, ticks and other insects in your lawn;
- 6) apply predatory nematodes in the lawn. They feed on flea eggs and larvae;
- 7) use food grade diatomaceous earth, which can kill the insects by piercing through the exoskeleton, causing dehydration and death.

As you can see, there are many different flea and tick control methods. You can choose the proper one based on your own preference for safety, degree of control, convenience and price. Regardless of the method you choose, precautions and label instructions should be followed strictly. Remember that fleas and ticks spend most of their life-cycle off the animals, so it is critical to treat the pet and the living environment at the same time. If in doubt, always contact the veterinarians, manufacturers or retailers before you apply the products.

