

FLEA AND TICK PROTECTION

by Carrie Donahue, DVM

Looking for a natural way to get flea and tick protection for your dog? Depending on your lifestyle and where you live, that can be easier said than done. Here are some natural ways to pursue prevention, and also some guidance if your pup does encounter these fur-loving pests.

HOW FLEAS AND TICKS FIND YOUR DOG

Here's the harsh truth—it only takes a small number of fleas to begin an infestation in an area. You might have the most meticulous yard, but small rodents like squirrels and raccoons can still invade your space, bringing with them fleas and ticks. Hiking in the woods, or even visiting your local dog park, can expose your pet to ticks. Beware—fleas and ticks aren't as apparent on long-haired

animals. They can be hard to find, so always do a thorough search after spending time outside. Also, be aware of the prime flea and tick times in your area. For warmer parts of the country, fleas and ticks can flourish year-round.

TAKE A NATURAL APPROACH

Consider natural prevention to combat these pests. Plant-based products containing essential oils can work wonders against fleas and ticks. If you want to make your own remedy, always dilute the essential oil with a carrier oil like olive oil or sweet almond oil before applying. Some effective essential oils include peppermint, clove, lavender, lemongrass, and cedar oils. But take care to use just a drop or two at most as dogs have sensitive noses. Try adding a drop to your dog's shampoo or spray some diluted oil on a doggy bandanna for your dog to wear outside. Just remember that less is more, so don't overdo it.

SAFELY REMOVE A TICK

Use FINE-POINT TWEEZERS, not large, blunt tweezers.

Spread your dog's fur, then grasp the tick as CLOSE TO THE SKIN as possible.

Gently pull STRAIGHT UPWARD in a slow, steady motion.

EVEN EASIER? Have a TICK REMOVAL HOOK on hand, available online.



It's also smart to add some powdered brewer's yeast to your pet's food. The typical dose is one-half teaspoon for every 10 pounds your dog weighs. Using wet food instead of dry food works especially well, but you can also dissolve the powder by mixing a little hot water into the dry food.

Already dealing with bug bites? Turn to one of nature's first remedies to address the discomfort, skin irritation, and itching. Known to extinguish inflammation and encourage cellular repair, comfrey is available as a dog-specific topical cream. Based on a unique comfrey cultivar known as Trauma Comfrey, the product is formulated without harmful compounds known as pyrrolizidine alkaloids (PAs). Trauma Comfrey also helps regenerate injured nerves, something that can occur with intense scratching from fleas and ticks. The active phytochemicals in the plant work together to heal and bring relief. As a bonus, it won't harm your pet if he or she licks the area where it has been applied.

If fleas are a particular problem, it's a good idea to groom your dog with a fine-toothed flea comb. Comb your pup outside and focus on the neck area and the base of the tail. Keep a cup of warm, soapy water beside you and dip the comb into the water frequently to drown the fleas.

Always take the time to examine your pet for fleas and ticks. Catching any problems early is a wise idea for both you and your pet. And, if you aren't getting either issue under control, don't be afraid to consult your veterinarian. ■



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