

MAKING FLEAS FLEE NATURALLY

Spring is the prime time to get ahead of fleas, so take spring cleaning in your yard as seriously as in your home and begin early. By initiating or modifying a few of the ways you care for your landscape you can eliminate nesting and breeding spaces and welcome their predators, an effect that can last all through the warm months of summer and fall, and even become a permanent solution to keeping fleas at a minimum in your yard.

Aside from the dangers of insecticide toxicity to your pet an insecticide generally kills off all the insects in an area and has even been implicated in the reduction of bee populations worldwide and the deaths of songbirds and endangered mammals. Also an insecticide just kills the adult fleas which are only about 10% of the total flea population and not the eggs or larvae. Pest insects have adapted to reproduce more quickly than their prey so repeated applications are necessary, natural predators are killed and chemicals build up toxic levels in your soil which run off into local waterways, affecting more wildlife than you ever intended.

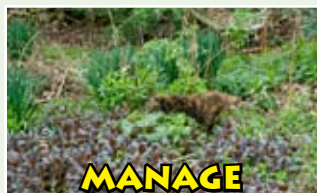
Adult fleas are very particular about moisture and temperature, but flea eggs can live through a lot of punishment and still hatch and carry on the next generation so they need to be managed from year to year, not just for the summer. But fleas are slow to wake up in the spring and are a snack for a number of predator insects. These two facts of their life cycle help you to get ahead of them.

INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT FOR BEGINNERS

1. Find out where the pest lives and destroy that habitat to any extent possible.
2. Find the pest's natural predators and encourage them to inhabit.

Fleas live in moist, shady areas in the yard, in the thatch in your lawn, debris piles, leaf litter, cord wood stacks and even under your deck or porch unless it's completely dry. They've often overwintered in these areas and with the moisture of spring eggs start hatching as soon as it's warm enough and shady after trees and shrubs have leafed out.

Fleas hatch when temperatures rise above 60 degrees at night or 70 degrees during the day.



SPRING CLEANING Clear off all the debris in the yard and toss it in the compost pile, burn it, send it off to your municipal composting center or as a last resort put it in trash bags and put it out with the trash.

MANAGE AREAS FLEAS PREFER Apply beneficial nematodes annually, minimize or eliminate damp and densely shaded areas in your yard, sprinkle food grade diatomaceous earth (DE) weekly under shrubs, decks and woodpiles and other shady areas.

MODIFY YOUR LAWN Incorporate native plants and herbs and cut lawn taller to reduce flea habitat and encourage the flea's natural predators: spiders and ground beetles, amphibians such as toads and salamanders, reptiles such as garter snakes, and birds such as robins, starlings and grackles. Continue feeding birds through the summer.

MANAGE WILDLIFE Discourage wildlife from living in or close to your home, or burrowing underground next to your foundation; contact a registered wildlife management agency to help discourage or remove the animals.

SOME RESOURCES FOR CHEMICAL-FREE OUTDOOR FLEA CONTROL

Yardener.com, "Preventing Fleas Next Year": <http://gardening.yardener.com/Preventing-Fleas-Next-Year>

McGill University, "DIATOMACEOUS EARTH: A Non Toxic Pesticide": <http://eap.mcgill.ca/publications/eap4.htm>

CDC Report on pyrethrins and pyrethroids: <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxprofiles/tp155.pdf>