

Bug Off Skeeters

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This time of year Citrus County is experiencing intense heat characteristic of the dog days of summer along with a regular dousing of afternoon showers. These weather conditions are ideal for mosquito breeding. You may have not given it much thought, but you can limit mosquito populations by diligently limiting breeding sites around your home. If there are any hidden places around your home where water collects such as water-holding containers, storm drains, clogged rain gutters, swimming pools, ornamental ponds, etc. - you may be breeding mosquitoes!



FACTS YOU SHOULD KNOW:

All mosquitoes need water to pass through their life stages. Adult flying mosquitoes can rest in grass, shrubbery, or other foliage, but they never breed there. Some mosquitoes lay their eggs in standing water where they hatch in a day or two. Other mosquitoes lay their eggs in old tires, tin cans and other such water-holding containers. The mosquitoes may remain unhatched for weeks, months or until they are covered with water. The mosquito "wigglers" or larvae grow quickly and turn into "tumblers" or pupae. Then the skin of the tumbler opens and out climbs a hungry adult mosquito.

Scout your yard and implement the following actions:

1. Empty, drain, remove, cover or turn upside down things that can hold water. Throw out old tires, tin cans, bottles, jars, buckets, drums, and other containers or keep them upside down so no water can enter them.
2. Empty any small plastic wading pools weekly. Store them indoors when not in use. Properly maintain your swimming pool and keep it covered so as not to collect water.
3. Repair leaky pipes and outside faucets. Don't let runoff water from your air conditioner collect in shady areas.
4. Change water and scrub birdbaths once a week.
5. Empty and refill pets' water pans daily.
6. Discard old tires or store them indoors.
7. Tip wheel barrows or other garden carts on end to avoid collecting water.

MOSQUITO BITES:

As everyone knows, mosquitoes are troublesome pests that can cause itchy bites and transmit viruses. The best way to avoid being bitten is to stay clear of mosquito-infested areas and wear protective clothing and insect repellent. The more skin you cover with layers of clothing, the fewer bites you will receive. Female mosquitoes feed on blood to help their eggs develop. When mosquitoes bite, they release saliva into the bite area. Allergic reactions to the saliva cause the itchy bumps and swollen hives some people get after being bitten.

If a mosquito is carrying a virus, that virus can be transferred to humans through the mosquito's saliva. Mosquito-borne diseases currently of public health concern in Florida include St. Louis encephalitis, eastern equine encephalitis, West Nile virus encephalitis, and dengue fever.

Another option is applying topical repellents. Repellents are used to repel mosquitoes — they do not kill them. The best repellents provide protection for a long period of time per application. Current repellents are either synthetic or plant-derived chemicals available in spray, wipe-on, foam, or lotion formulas.

DEET is a highly effective repellent. "DEET" may not be on a product's label—its chemical names might be listed instead: N,N-diethyl-m-toluamide, N,N-diemethylbenzamide. In addition to DEET, the CDC added the following to its list of recommended repellents: Picaridin, (Chemical name: 1-Piperidinecarboxylic acid; 2-(2-hydroxyethyl);1-methylpropylester), and Oil of Lemon-Eucalyptus (Chemical name: p-menthane 3,8-diol (PMD)) . The EPA has determined that correct and normal usage of DEET is not a health concern. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends using DEET products with a 30% concentration or less on children. (Insect repellents shouldn't be used at all on children younger than 2 months old.)

For more information, please contact Citrus County Extension at 352-527-5700.

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This was written by former Citrus County Extension Director, Dr. Joan Bradshaw, and remains valid today.