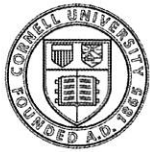


HOME GROUNDS FACT SHEET



Cornell University
Cooperative Extension
Nassau County

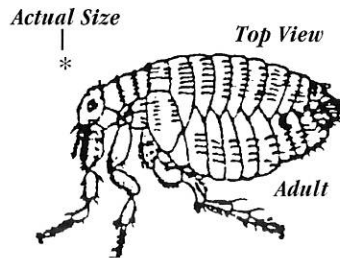


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Controlling Fleas

Description and injury

Fleas are small, wingless insects that feed on the blood of birds and mammals. Homes in neighborhoods with a large number of squirrels and rabbits usually have a flea problem. Many species are annoying because of their bites. A few act as vectors of disease, and some burrow into the skin of man or other animals. Fleas are usually brown in color, have long hind legs for jumping and sucking mouth parts. They have a very painful bite and usually bite their victims from the knees down.



Life history

Females lay eggs, usually on the host, after taking a blood meal. The eggs are not attached to the host and soon fall off to develop on the ground or in the host's nest or resting place. The eggs hatch into tiny, whitish, legless larvae with bristly hairs. The head is well developed with chewing mouthparts. Flea larvae feed on organic debris, their own cast skins and on the feces of adult fleas. The larval stage may last from 8 to 24 days in the summertime. When fully grown, the larva spins a silken cocoon and enters the pupal or resting stage (lasting usually 5 to 14 days). Adult fleas crawl on blades of grass or furniture, and wait for a host to pass. They jump quickly onto the host and begin feeding. Adult fleas are long lived; they may survive for a year or more and are able to go for several weeks without feeding. Fleas may also be driven into the house during prolonged periods of wet weather.

Integrated Pest Management (IPM)

Considerations

IPM is a common sense approach to pest control and plant care. It employs a number of measures to prevent, control or reduce problems. Always use the least toxic methods first.

A good mechanical control, in many instances, is to vacuum the insects and then throw the bag away. Regarding household pests, in addition to regular house-cleaning, the best preventive method is to

monitor the home, i.e. note any cracks in foundations, air spaces between windows and frames, poorly-fitting doors, moisture from leaks, etc., and correct such examples/situations.

Management

1. Treat pets and their sleeping quarters with the advice of a veterinarian. Be sure to treat sleeping quarters before you leave for a vacation, especially if the pet will also be absent. Pet bedding can often be washed or dry cleaned.

2. In the home, fleas can often be controlled by a combination of good house-keeping and a household insecticide.

Thoroughly clean all areas of the house with a vacuum cleaner - include carpets, rugs, upholstered furniture and other items on which eggs or larvae of adults may be present. Vacuum daily.

Chemical pesticides are available. If you choose to use chemical pesticides, contact your local Cooperative Extension office for specific recommendations. Flea control materials must be applied to places where adults and larvae are likely to be found - pet bedding areas are a prime target. Total control has a three-fold approach: pets, the interior of the house, and out of doors. Crack and crevice aerosol applicators are ideal for treating openings where fleas may hide. Treat directly for maximum effect with little drift into non-target areas. Caulk or seal unnecessary openings.

Some formulations may contain an insect growth regulator known as methoprene (often sold under the name "Precor"). When a flea larva ingests or comes in contact with methoprene, it still grows and pupates normally, but it fails to mature to an adult. Adult fleas are not affected by the growth regulator, but when they die, they will not be replaced by newly-maturing adults. Because adults are not affected, methoprene alone is not recommended for existing flea problems.

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3. During the warmer months, if your pet circulates in and out of doors it is also necessary to control fleas in the yard and under buildings. Dust or granular formulations are more effective than short-lived liquid materials. Treat all areas of the yard except children's sandboxes. Sandboxes should be covered to exclude cats when not in use. If adult fleas are present, either replace sand or lay several floor tile-sized pieces of cardboard layered with vaseline in a covered sand box for 10 days. As the fleas hop, they will become stuck to the traps and eliminated. Do not use insecticides in sandboxes.
4. Contact a professional pest control operator for flea problems too great to handle on a self-help basis.
See Home Grounds fact sheet B-2-17, How to Select a Pest Control Applicator.
5. For use of flea collars for pets, consult your veterinarian.
6. Where very high squirrel, rabbit or rodent populations exist, rent or purchase traps that capture the animals alive. State regulations prohibit the unlicensed transportation of captured animals, but do recommend that the trap be submerged in a garbage can full of water for one-half an hour. The Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has an animal control hot line where state regulations and additional help can be discussed. Call (631) 444-0310 from 8 a.m. - 4:45 p.m. weekdays.

"This publication contains pesticide recommendations. Changes in pesticide regulations occur constantly and human errors are still possible. Some materials mentioned may no longer be available, and some uses may no longer be legal. All pesticides distributed, sold or applied in New York State must be registered with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). Questions concerning the legality and/or registration status for pesticide use in New York State should be directed to the appropriate Cornell Cooperative Extension specialist or your regional DEC office (631) 444-0340. Read the label before applying any pesticide. Cornell Cooperative Extension and its employees assume no liability for the effectiveness or results of any chemicals for pesticide usage. No endorsement of products is made or implied."