

# The Best Ways to Make the Fleas Flee:

Start with prevention:

Don't wait till fleas make their appearance before doing something about them. Taking preventative steps before the season starts will help your dog or cat repel any fleas he does happen to pick up, and greatly minimize the chances of an infestation. The two keys to prevention are a healthy immune system and good hygiene.

## 1. DIET:

The healthier and stronger your companion is, the less he'll be affected by fleas. One of the primary ways to keep him in peak condition is to feed him a high quality diet made with whole, natural ingredients free of hormones and pesticides. Stay away from those cheap commercial diets containing artificial preservatives, coloring and other additives; these toxins are secreted through the hair follicles and can exacerbate skin problems, including flea bite dermatitis. Instead, try a raw frozen or premium canned food. A good diet will not only improve your companion's wellness all round, but will also go a long way towards keeping fleas at bay.

## 2. SUPPLEMENTS:

The great thing about flea repelling supplements is that they're also good for overall health. Salmon or flaxseed oils are full of essential fatty acids that promote healthy hair and skin, while adding a clove of fresh grated garlic to your dog's food each day will help build up his immunity and generate an odor fleas find unattractive. Many vets don't recommend feeding garlic to cats because it can sometimes damage the red blood cells and cause anemia. Try brewer's yeast instead: it's a good source of vitamin B1 and also acts as a flea repellent. When introducing any supplement to your animal's diet, it's a good idea to talk to a holistic vet.

## 3. GROOMING:

Frequently brushing your dog or cat removes the dead hair, mats and tangles that provide a perfect hiding place for fleas. Ideally, your animal should be brushed daily, but once or twice a week will suffice if you do a thorough job. Invest in a flea comb as well: this fine-toothed grooming tool is designed to snag adult fleas. Be sure to get the comb as close to the skin as possible and pay special attention to areas where fleas congregate: under the legs, around the head and tail, and the belly area.

## 4. BATHING:

Regular bathing is a highly effective way to help keep fleas off your animal. Just be sure to use a gentle shampoo with natural ingredients that won't dry out or irritate his skin – aloe and oatmeal is an excellent choice. For dogs, you can also select from natural shampoos, conditioners and rinses that contain flea-repelling essential oils such as lavender, rosemary, tea tree, mint, neem and citrus. These oils offer the added benefits of soothing and refreshing the skin and cutting through odor and grease without drying the coat. Remember not to use essential oils on cats – they're toxic to felines. When bathing your animal, soap him well, especially around the areas where fleas can collect, and try to leave the lather on for 10 to 15 minutes, to drown existing fleas. Rinse thoroughly.

Control measures:

What if you already have a serious flea problem? The above suggestions are still crucial, but you'll need to take a few additional measures. Fleas reproduce prolifically and rapidly, which means you need to break their life cycle in order to get rid of them. And although adult fleas lay their eggs on your animal, the eggs drop off into the environment before hatching. Once the larvae mature into adult fleas, they jump on the animal and start feeding. As you can see, it's a vicious circle, and while flea-repelling products can help, they don't actually kill

the fleas, eggs or larvae. So as well as looking after your animal's hygiene and health, you also need to tackle his environment in order to have a real impact on the fleas.

#### 5. INSIDE THE HOUSE:

Go on a major cleaning spree. Thoroughly vacuum all carpets and upholstery, taking care to get into all those dark corners and crevices and along the baseboards. Dispose of the vacuum bag promptly. Launder in hot water anything that can be washed, such as cushion covers, curtains, or bed spreads. Frequently wash your animal's bedding and regularly clean all other surfaces he lies on. To help keep fleas from returning to the bedding, try sprinkling some cedar shavings or lavender seeds in and around it.

You can also carefully sprinkle natural, unprocessed diatomaceous earth on carpets, along walls and in cracks in the floor or corners. It will damage the fleas' interior functions and kill them. Sodium based flea-killing products, meanwhile, act as a dessicant and break the life cycle by drying out flea eggs and larvae.

#### 6. OUTSIDE:

In warm weather, fleas can live quite happily in your backyard, ready to jump on your companion as soon as he walks past. Clear the area of any piles of dead leaves, brush, or other yard and garden debris where fleas can hide, and keep dog houses or cat enclosures clean and dry. Consider buying beneficial nematodes – these are naturally occurring microscopic worms that kill fleas by infesting their larvae. The Steinernema (Sc or Sf) varieties are the best. Nematodes are usually available in a pellet or powdered form; just mix them with water and spread them over the area you wish to treat, using a watering can or sprayer.

#### 7. TOPICALS:

For dogs with fleas, essential oils can make an effective alternative to chemical spot-ons. Tea tree oil is especially effective and will kill fleas when used as a topical. Keep in mind that essential oils are very strong and should be used sparingly. It's best to dilute them with some water rather than use them neat. Consult with a professional aromatherapist for more detailed advice. Again, do not use these oils on cats. Use aromatic hydrosols instead. A hydrosol is not the same as a diluted essential oil: it's the water (sometimes called floral water) that's left over after an essential oil is produced using steam or water distillation. Herbal flea powders and collars are another alternative – be sure to get a natural product.

In many regions, it's still early in the year to be thinking about fleas. But the sooner you put a prevention program in place, the better your companion will cope if he does pick up a few fleas this summer, and the easier it will be to keep them under control.

#### Conventional flea products:

When dealing with a serious flea infestation, it can be tempting to resort to chemical treatments. While it's true that some of these products may work faster than more natural alternatives, you pay for it by exposing your animal (and yourself) to toxic substances that can have a variety of adverse effects. In addition, overuse of pesticides can actually cause immunity in new generations of fleas. It's therefore best to avoid commercial flea powders, collars and sprays altogether.

The same issues apply to non-OTC chemical spot-ons. Here's a brief overview of a few of the ingredients used in these products, and the potential health problems that have been linked to them.

Fibronil: skin irritation, thyroid cancer, skin irritation and damage to organs, nervous system and reproductive system.

Imidacloprid: organ damage, and neurological or reproductive disorders.

Selamectin: ingestion may cause vomiting, diarrhea, muscle tremors, drooling and lethargy.

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