

## ATTACK OF THE KILLER FLEAS!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Ok, not quite, but fleas can suck enough blood to cause severe anemia. Some animals even need a transfusion! Puppies and kittens can be so heavily infested to cause severe anemia and death! Fleas carry diseases such as tapeworms (when the flea is eaten by the pet), Bartonellosis (cat scratch fever), plague, and others. Fleas generally prefer dogs over cats, and pets over people (the little red dots you may be finding around your feet, ankles, and shins), but when there are enough fleas and they are really hungry, they will go for anything warm blooded.

Fleas like temperatures of 65 degrees and above, so they don't generally start to be seen outdoors until about May. Adult fleas feed on the blood of mammals. They lay eggs, which fall to the ground/ floor and hatch. The larvae feed on tiny pieces of skin, etc on the ground/ floor. They then go into a pupa (cocoon phase) before hatching back to the next adult generation. There is no set time schedule for this. The warmer, more humid weather will be faster, the cooler, drier weather will be slower. Indoors, the temperature is perfect for year round fleas.

Because fleas are NOT just on the pet, we need to treat EVERYTHING: the whole house (remember, they can jump 14 feet per jump!), the pet, and probably the outside.

### *Pet options:*

1. Flea baths. This will give you a very clean animal and will likely kill some fleas, but not many. If the fleas jump off before reaching the tub, they won't die, and flea shampoo ingredients are very short acting, so fleas can jump right back on. Any shampoo can be used to remove flea dirt ( the little black pieces that turn reddish brown when wet---because it's really flea poop, which is digested blood sucked from the pet!), which is useful to tell how you are doing. If you are seeing flea dirt again, you still have fleas.

2. Flea sprays/ powders/ wipes. Some animals really object to being sprayed. Powders are messy. Read the label to be sure it's ok to use on cats. These usually require fairly frequent application and must be thorough (e.g., sprayed enough to slightly dampen all the hair and skin).

3. Collars. Some cats can't wear them because it causes local irritation. Altho they are easy to use, and last for several months (varies with manufacturer), they don't work that well.

4. Spot-ons. The newest option. You open the tube and squirt spots on the skin once monthly and that's it. These can be bathed off, so if you are bathing frequently, don't use them.

A. Advantage. Veterinarian supplied. Kills fleas the fastest. Dogs, cats.

B. Advantix. Veterinarian supplied. Kills and repels fleas, ticks and repels mosquitoes. DOGS ONLY.

C. Frontline. Veterinarian supplied. Kills fleas and ticks. Dogs, cats.

D. Revolution. Veterinarian supplied. Kills fleas, heartworms, some

intestinal worms, and ear mites. Will kill ticks but very slowly, so not suggested for ticks. Dogs, cats.

E. Permethrin. Many over the counter brands. Kills and repels fleas and ticks, repels mosquitoes. **DOGS ONLY.**

F. Various over the counter cat spot ons. The only over the counter flea killer is permethrin, and it can't be used on cats. The cat spot ons contain only ingredients to keep eggs from hatching---they do NOT KILL fleas at all. Many come with a "wet wipe" that has some pyrethrin in it to help kill the fleas, but this is very short acting.

5. Program. Veterinarian supplied. "Birth control pills". Does not kill the fleas. When the flea bites and sucks blood, it gets the drug and none of its eggs can hatch. Useful to help keep flea populations from ever starting if Program is started in May and given monthly. Useful for dogs/ cats that are bathed frequently, since nothing is ON the pet. Useful for pets whose owners are allergic to topical flea treatments. Dogs, cats. (There are some over the counter versions of a different drug that may need to be given more frequently.)

6. Capstar. Veterinarian supplied. Pills that actually kill fleas (when they bite the pet). Extremely useful to kill lots of fleas quickly. Can be used before going to the groomer and when picking the pet up from boarding to avoid coming home with more animals than you took in! Normally given daily for 6 days while the spot ons are kicking in.

7. Pennyroyal. **NOT RECOMMENDED.** There have been too many reports of toxicity.

8. Garlic and brewer's yeast pills. Easy to use, many pets like the taste, but usually don't work well and garlic can cause anemia.

### *Environment options:*

1. Clean like crazy. Vacuum up the fleas---empty the canister or dump the entire bag to keep them from getting back out. Washing bedding, etc. that is laundry safe in hot water.

2. Powders. Usually boron or silica based. The idea is to plug up the respiratory holes in the outer skeleton of the flea as they walk through the powder, so they die. Messy and you aren't supposed to vacuum for awhile or you take it right back up.

3. Bombs/ foggers. Usually over kill. The smallest one is for 250 sq ft--that's a 10x25 ft room, which is much larger than most rooms. They don't spread from one room to another well, so you need one in EVERY room. They will cover walls and ceilings, so they are useful for spiders but fleas aren't up that high, so it's more chemicals than you need. You have to leave during fogging, come back and air out the house and leave for awhile again.

4. Sprays. Either trigger sprays or cans. Same chemicals as the foggers, but you control where it goes, so less chemicals are wasted going places you don't need. Be sure to get under furniture (foggers don't), along baseboards, behind appliances.

(NOTE: both foggers and sprays should contain 2 chemicals---1 to kill the fleas, usually some kind of "thrin" like permethrin, sumethrin, cytomethrin, tetramethrin, for up to 3 weeks ---and 1 to keep eggs from hatching, Nylar or

Methoprene, for up to 5 months. However, if you damp mop or steam clean, you will take it up and need to re-apply. Some people can get by with only 1 application, but some need 2, about 3 to 4 weeks apart. This is because nothing gets the pupa stage, so if they hatch out into adults after the 3 weeks, there isn't anything there to kill them, although there is still stuff to keep the new eggs from hatching into even more fleas.)

5. Yard treatments. Anything that kills other lawn bugs will kill fleas too, except the special stuff just for grubs. Most yard treatments need to be applied every 2 to 3 weeks to stay effective because they break down in sunlight or get washed away in the rain.

### **MY PET IS ITCHING AND PULLING HAIR OUT BUT I SEE ONLY 1 FLEA!**

Your pet has flea bite allergies. Even one bite can set them off. Loads of bites can cause severe skin infections from all the scratching. You will need to be diligent on flea control, but there is not a product in the world that will kill every flea before it bites. Therefore, many of these pets need some "cortisone" during the flea season to control the itching.

### **A WORD ABOUT TICKS.**

Ticks are not fleas. They are harder to kill---the fastest tick killer, permethrin, still takes up to 24 hours to kill ticks. You may still find ticks that are biting on your pet. Fortunately, it takes up to 24 hours for ticks to get their mouth parts settled into the skin and really start to suck blood and transmit disease, so permethrin is very helpful. Unfortunately, it can't be used on cats. Only Frontline can be used on cats for ticks. For dogs, there is also a collar containing amitraz (Preventic and Tick Arrest are the brands). The amitraz leaches from the collar and mixes with the skin oils. Amitraz makes the tick not want to bite (and eventually will die). The collars are easy to use and last a few months. BUT, if they are chewed or eaten, the amitraz will knock the dog flat and you will need to see a vet for an antidote injection. The amitraz collars can be taken off for swimming/baths, and some people who have vacation homes and that is the only place they need protection against ticks can put the collar in a tightly closed plastic bag when not in use to make them last longer.