

## Retreat, Fleas!

**We're better armed than ever for the Battle of the Bug. Learn how to keep your pet—and your home—free of fleas.**

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Some natural products have been proven effective, such as limonene and borate powders. Borate powders are best applied by a professional; excessive inhalation can endanger humans and pets. Borates are great if you don't want to put insect growth regulators in your home; like IGRs, they target immature fleas.

If you have money to spare and prefer a natural approach, they may be worth a try, especially as a preventive or if your flea problem isn't too severe. But don't assume "natural" means safe. Some natural products are highly toxic.

Don't forget the good old-fashioned 100 percent nontoxic flea comb. "I'm a big advocate of flea combs," said Noxen, who suggested pet owners use them regularly to remove fleas from pets. Bill Fitzgerald of Bartlett, Illinois, companion to a 9-year-old black Labrador Retriever named Tess, also strongly supports flea comb use. "I comb Tess every three to four days, and that takes care of all the fleas," he said. Fitzgerald also lives in an apartment with wood floors and no carpeting, and vacuums frequently all of which discourage fleas.

Winning the War Meanwhile, scientists research new and better flea-control methods. "There won't be anything new in the short term, but in the long term, we'll be seeing a lot of sophisticated attempts to use the animal's immune system against the fleas," Noxen said. One way this could be accomplished is through a flea vaccine, which many scientists are researching. "A flea vaccine could go two way," Richman explained. "The flea could bite the animal, then die because of antibodies from the vaccine. But the trouble with that is the fleas still have to bite the animal, and we want a world where fleas never bite the animal. The other option is a vaccine that works on the animal's side to prevent a reaction."

Another area of research is geared toward treating fleabite dermatitis. For sensitive dogs, a single bite can trigger a major reaction within 24 hours.

Pay attention to your pet's condition through regular grooming, keep in touch with your veterinarian about the latest flea-control methods, then be diligent and consistent about using the flea-control method you choose.

We may never see a flea-free world. But a flea-free home? A flea-free pet? Those goals lie well within your grasp.