

## 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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Fleas love warm weather, and so do dogs. And the inevitable occurs: Just as the weather entices your dog to spend long, lazy days lounging in the sun, out come the fleas, hungry for a feast.

Will the annual battle against fleas ever end? Chances are, this war will be eternal. "It's a long-term war, one battle after another," said James Noxen, DVM, veterinary clinical sciences professor and staff dermatologist at Iowa State College of Veterinary Medicine in Ames.

Ironically, part of the reason our pets probably will never be flea-free: Use of flea-control products forces reproduction of fleas resistant to them, said Dina Richman, an urban entomologist who specializes in flea control in the entomology and nematology department at the University of Florida, Gainesville. "The more fleas are exposed to these products, the faster they develop resistance," she said. "We are forcing nature to select the most resistant fleas because the ones that survive our pest-control efforts are the ones that keep breeding, and they pass on that resistance to their offspring."

Eternal battle or not, you can win control over a flea problem in your home and on your dog, and do so with greater ease and speed than ever.

Fleas are more than a nuisance. A single bite can send a severely allergic dog into a literal tailspin of itching, scratching and biting called flea bite dermatitis. A severe infestation can make your dog anemic through blood loss, and if it swallows a flea, the flea could transmit tapeworms. In rare cases, fleas can even transmit bubonic plague to humans. You don't want them around.

But you knew that and you still find them sneaking up your dog's tail or leaping from its favorite spot onto you. "My dog was really bad last year," said Dana Veatch of Atlanta, owner of Bronte, a 6-year-old Boxer. "I tried everything that's supposed to work. I bombed the house, gave her flea baths, had her on [an adulticide and an insect growth regulator], and the next day all she had to do was go outside once and she was covered again. I could see 20 or more fleas on her at one time." Unfortunately for Veatch and anyone else who lives in a moderate climate fleas love mild temperatures and high humidity.

But warm locations aren't the only places fleas favor. Flea problems began for Ben Anderson and his Golden Retriever/American Eskimo mix, Sabbath, in Iowa City, Iowa, and continued when they moved to Knoxville, Tennessee. Sabbath is allergic to flea bites, Anderson said. "Every fall, he'll scratch himself raw, and his skin becomes so sensitive that even petting him will set him off scratching again." Anderson uses a spot-on treatment, shaves his dog in early August and bathes him in a medicated shampoo specially formulated to cool the itch of fleabite dermatitis. Sabbath suffers despite his owner's best efforts and with more than itchy skin. "Every year for the last three years, he's gotten tapeworms," Anderson said. "He'll get them before I even see a single flea."