

Help Your Dog Win the War Against Fleas, Naturally

Five natural tips to fight fleas on your dog, and inside and outside your home.

By Shawn Messonnier, D.V.M.

Sometimes killing fleas is easy. You bathe your dog a few times, use an organic insecticide spray or powder, and the problem goes away. Other times, the problem is more severe, requiring greater action and effort on your part. For more problematic infestations, employ these five steps to quickly kill fleas and make your dog more comfortable. Treat the environment, inside and out. Fleas spend 95 percent of their life cycle (eggs, larvae, cocoons) off the dog. Therefore, direct most of the treatment outside and inside the house. When flea treatments don't seem to work, it's usually because the environment is not treated properly.

Beneficial nematodes are microscopic worms that kill adult fleas and flea cocoons. Unlike chemical insecticides, nematodes are completely safe and environmentally friendly. Apply the nematodes to the yard in the fall and spring, and as needed. Find beneficial nematodes in home-and-garden stores.

For the house, citrus-oil sprays, borate products (which contain derivatives of borate) and diatomaceous earth (a natural insecticide) work best. Apply these products indoors, instead of using chemicals.

All pets must be treated, not just those that itch or have obvious signs of fleas. Bathing regularly (every 24 to 72 hours) with an organic shampoo (such as my own brand, Dr. Shawn's Organic Flea & Tick Shampoo) quickly kills fleas, reduces itching and relieves skin inflammation. Use herbal powders and sprays as needed. In severe cases, apply a topical chemical insecticide every one to three months. Usually, one or two applications suffice.

Vacuum and mop regularly. For maximum effectiveness, steam-clean carpets whenever fleas are a problem. Because flea eggs are typically found where the dog spends most of its time, wash all sheets, towels, blankets and other bedding (both your dog's and yours) in hot water daily until the flea infestation is under control.