



PAWS AND PAGES: PESKY PEST CONTROL

By DEVON APODACA Special to This Newspaper

With spring comes warmer temperatures and we all know what it means -- increased traffic of bugs and pests. Although spring technically starts March 20, now would be the best time to start your fur-kids on a parasite prevention regimen if they aren't on one already.

Now all animals, including insects, have a purpose within the ecosystem and the mere presence of them is a sign of healthy soil. However, pests develop when plants and animals are introduced to environments where there are no natural predators or deterrents, and they become destructive by attacking crops, pets, livestock, etc.

When our pets spend time outside sniffing plants, walking around the neighborhood with us, or simply rolling around in the grass, the chances of them encountering fleas and ticks increases. Fleas and ticks are very different bugs with their own characteristics and diseases they can carry that may pose a threat to the health of our pets and that of ourselves.

Fleas feed on your pet's blood and are responsible for diseases like flea allergy dermatitis (FAD) and are known carriers of tapeworms which can be passed on to your pets. Fleas thrive in warm and humid temperatures. Pets that are heavily infested with fleas can suffer from extreme anemia, which can be life-threatening.

Ticks are related to mites and spiders. They can be resistant to pesticides, which is why they are found throughout the country, regardless of weather or temperatures. Unfortunately, ticks are what we have abundantly in the Imperial Valley and a single tick bite can expose your pet to multiple diseases. Ticks are responsible for carrying Ehrlichia, anaplasmosis, Lyme disease and Rocky Mountain spotted fever. Some of these diseases can be transmitted to people and can be very detrimental to our health.

There are the traditional flea-and-tick preventatives, which include pesticides for your yard and home, and topical ointments that are placed directly on pets. The problem with these forms of flea-and-tick prevention is that some of the chemicals used may not break down. They dry out and form a residue that can linger around for months in the yard, inside the home, on our pets and even on you.

Research and studies have shown that using topical flea-and-tick preventatives could be harmful to the health of our pets, especially for those pets with a compromised immune system or chronic diseases. Some other forms of parasite control come in a chewable treat that basically works from the inside. They last much longer and seem to be much more effective, but some pet owners have reported adverse effects.

The Humane Society of Imperial County always strongly suggests speaking with your family veterinarian when it comes to selecting a chemical flea-and-tick preventative for your pets.

For those who like to take a more natural approach, there are several easy and natural ways to keep pests out and away that are healthy and safe alternatives for your pets and household:

1. Keep your lawn mowed and clear of debris.
2. Wash pet bed and toys often.
3. Vacuum your house regularly.
4. Add beneficial nematodes to your flower beds and yard.
5. Bath and brush your pets often.
6. Check your pet's fur daily.
7. Feed a healthy diet.
8. Provide clean and filtered water to your pet at all times.
9. Use natural flea/tick repellants that use essential oils like lemongrass, lavender, or catnip oils

10. Sprinkling diatomaceous earth around your fence and house. This is a non-toxic powder consisting of ground fossils and water organisms that is lethal to ticks, fleas and other insects. Read instructions carefully.

11. Look for non-toxic home/yard and pet products containing cedar wood oil as it is scientifically proven to kill and repel pests while providing aroma-therapeutic qualities for calming, soothing and comforting.

By using natural and non-toxic pest control products not only are you protecting your family and pets, but you are also protecting your yard and its tiny fauna as these products are safe for butterflies, bees and other beneficial insects.

For more tips and advice on flea and tick prevention, please speak with your local family veterinarian.