



Avoid Perfumes and Avoid Becoming Bug Bait

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Heavily scented soaps, perfumes, hair care products and lotions attract bugs as well as woods and standing water. It's important to protect your family from insect-borne diseases.

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LITTLE ROCK, Ark. - Perfumes and cologne may attract more than the opposite sex, said Margaret Harris, assistant professor-health for the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture.

"If you're looking to avoid insects this summer, scents are a no-no," she said. "Make sure not to wear any heavily scented soaps, perfumes, hair care products or lotions because the smells attract the bugs to you."

While dining al fresco is hard to resist in the summer, food and garbage scents also attract insects, Harris said.

Keeping the insects at bay means more than just a matter of preventing a few itchy bumps. It can prevent diseases carried by insects.

"West Nile Virus and Lyme Disease are among the more well known insect-borne threats," Harris said. "Preventing insect bites can be a life-saver."

The National Center for Infectious Diseases, part of the Centers for Disease Control, has an extensive list of insect-borne diseases and reported infections that includes:

- Mosquito-borne diseases - Eastern equine encephalitis (no human cases reported in Arkansas between 1964-2008), West Nile Virus (one case reported in Arkansas, 2009)
- Tick-borne diseases - Lyme disease (one case reported in Arkansas, 2007), ehrlichiosis, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, tularemia, Southern tick-associated rash illness
- Fleas - Plague

Non-chemical defense include wearing long sleeves and long pants. "Try to wear light, neutral-colored clothing so as not to attract the bugs to you in the first place," she said. "Insist that kids wear shoes when playing outside to avoid fire ant bites."

It's hard to spend the Arkansas summer in the house, but Harris said there are yard maintenance actions that can help reduce biting insect populations.

"Mosquitoes, ticks and other biting insects live in wooded, brushy and grassy areas," she said. "Chiggers love grass and weeds, so make sure the lawn is clipped."

"Mosquitoes and fire ants like standing water, such as puddles, birdbaths, or flower pots," Harris said. "Be sure to turn over containers so water doesn't pool and try to fix any depressions that could collect water."

If wading through the brush is unavoidable, "treat clothing, shoes and camping gear with permethrin," she said. "This repels and kills ticks, mosquitoes and other insects. You can also buy pre-treated clothing."

Harris also advises buyers to be sure repellants are registered with the EPA and that they contain no more than 10 percent DEET.

"You can spray the repellant on clothes and skin, but never on the face," she said, adding "repellent should never be sprayed on babies."

Natural repellants, such as citronella, eucalyptus and tea tree oil are not registered with the EPA, but many find these a more acceptable alternative to other chemicals. While these ingredients are found in nature, they should never be eaten or applied to food.

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