

# Make Fleas Flee

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — When the ancient Chinese wanted to get rid of fleas, they wore a cumbersome trap made of ivory around their necks. Today, better methods exist.

"The best way to rid your home of fleas is to treat both your home and your infected pet at the same time," said Dr. Robert Snetsinger, professor of entomology in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences. "Too often people rely upon only one of these methods and fleas escape extermination."

Fleas are transmitted primarily from contact between animals, though they can be picked up in backyards and other areas where infected animals have spent time.

Fleas prefer animal blood and bite humans only when exceptionally hungry. People usually are bothered by fleas when they return home from vacation or move into a new home or apartment. In both cases, the fleas probably have been deprived of food and are ready to bite whatever comes their way.

Because fleas can survive for six to eight months without eating, new tenants or homeowners should hire a pest control company to inspect for fleas, even when the new home has been unoccupied for a long time.

"Fleas spend only about 10 percent of the time on pets," Snetsinger said. "The rest of the time they live in thick carpets and moist crevices of the home."

"If you know or suspect there are fleas in your home, thoroughly vacuum not only the carpets, but the floors and the corners of each room, to get rid of both the insects and their larvae," he said. "Then dispose of the vacuum bag."

If problems persist, Snetsinger recommends that homeowners hire a pest control company rather than try to treat their home with pesticides themselves. "Most people don't have the experience to treat all the infested areas," he said. "They might use too much pesticide or not apply it in enough places. Children and pets should be kept away from treated areas

while the areas are still wet."

Homeowners can treat their pets with flea powders, sprays, or shampoos. Veterinarians can specify which particular insecticides would be most effective for individual pets. These insecticides may cause fleas to bite the pet as they die, so the pet may show some discomfort after being treated.

Animals in the northeastern

United States rarely contract any health problems from fleas beyond skin irritation, said Snetsinger, but repeated treatment and exposure to insecticides in carpet may be dangerous to pets.

Flea bites are relatively harmless to humans, causing itching

and slight swelling. But in the 14th century, fleas were associated with bubonic plague, which killed a quarter of Europe's population. Today, isolated, treatable cases of the plague sometimes occur in the southwestern part of the U.S.

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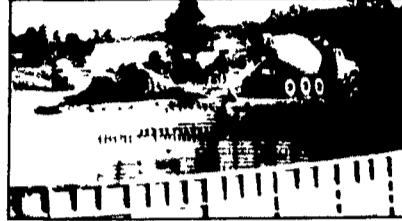
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