Protecting yourself from mosquito bites has become more of a concern this past year because of the reports of mosquito-transmitted diseases, such as the West Nile virus, Eastern equine encephalitis and St. Louis encephalitis.

The best way to avoid mosquito bites is to stay indoors, but that is not very practical for most of us. Instead, we have to rely on mosquito repellents to defend us against this bloodsucking enemy of ours. Before choosing a defense, it is very important to know what repellents are available and the correct way to use them.

Believe it or not, mosquitoes are attracted to some people more than others. They will search out their perfect victim. All you have to do is breathe. Mosquitoes use their sense of smell to find you from up to 40 miles away.

Natural excretions, such as perspiration, and the use of skin-care products attract mosquitoes. Also medications such as heart and blood-pressure medicine can attract the insects.

Mosquitoes are looking for the perfect blood, which will be high in cholesterol and vitamin B. This is why some people are more susceptible to bites than others. Mosquitoes are most active from dusk to dawn. If you are outside during these peak biting times, it is important to wear an insect repellent to protect yourself from their bites. Angela Brammer, a graduate student in entomology at the University of Florida, has been studying the effectiveness of different types of mosquito repellents.

DEET, short for diethyltoluamide, is the most effective and widely available repellent. It is available in many forms, including lotions, sprays and oils. Depending on the situation, DEET can provide between two and eight hours of protection from mosquito bites.

Brammer recommends using a product containing 10 to 35% DEET on adults and no greater than a concentration of 10% DEET on children. DEET may be identified as "diethyltoluamide" or "N,N-diethylmetatoluamide" under the listing of active ingredients, instead of DEET, on the labels of insect repellents.

Someone using a DEET product must be careful during application. DEET can damage plastics, leather and synthetic fabrics, including eyeglasses and watchbands. It does not, however, damage cotton, wool or nylon.

Always read the label and apply DEET properly. It can be toxic if used improperly, especially to children.

Citronella is another common ingredient in insect repellents. It is found in oils, sprays and candles. Citronella has shown to be most effective against mosquito bites for 30 to 40 minutes after application and should be reapplied every two hours.

Permethrin is a synthetic insecticide that kills mosquitoes on contact. This repellent should be applied only to clothing, tents and other fabrics. It does not offer any protection from mosquitoes when applied to the skin.

A natural insect repellent that is effective against mosquitoes, ticks and "no-see-ums" is also available. This product is that is effective against mosquitoes, ticks and "no-see-ums" is also available. This product is made of oil that is extracted from plants that have a natural ability to protect themselves instead of feeding insects. It is applied to the skin and protects for up to four hours. It was developed by an entomologist at the University of Florida and is marketed under the name MosquitoSafe. It has only
available through the Web site http://www.jefferspet.com/ssc/.

Florida is a prime breeding place for mosquitoes, so keep yourself and your family safe by protecting yourself against their bites. Cover exposed skin with clothing when you are outside from dusk to dawn or use an insect repellent. If you use a repellent, read the label and apply it correctly. More is not always better when it comes to insecticides. For information on mosquitoes and their control, call the Osceola County Extension Office at (321)697-3000.

Jennifer Welshans
Horticulture Agent
Osceola County Extension Service
1921 Kissimmee Valley Lane
Kissimmee, FL 34744
321-697-3000
jwel2@osceola.org
osceola.ifas.ufl.edu
Date: March 30th, 2002