GET TO MOSQUITOES BEFORE THEY GET YOU

With the large quantity of rainfall we've been receiving this summer, we find a lot of areas in our landscapes submerged. Standing water is the ideal breeding site for mosquitoes.

If you are like me, as soon as I walk outdoors, I am attacked by these pesky insects. Not only do their bites cause red, itchy welts, but mosquitoes also can transmit some deadly diseases, such as the West Nile virus, Eastern equine encephalitis and St. Louis encephalitis.

Personal protection is key to preventing mosquito bites. The best way to avoid bites is to stay indoors, but that is not practical for most of us. Instead, we have to rely on mosquito repellents to defend us against this bloodsucking enemy. Before choosing a defense, it is 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, the use of skin-care products and medications, such as heart and blood pressure medicine, can also attract mosquitoes.

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 insect repellent to protect yourself.

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% on children. DEET may be identified as "diethyltoluamide" or "N,N-diethylmetatoluamide" under the listing of active ingredients on the label.

Anyone 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 been 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 repellant should be applied only to clothing, tents and other fabrics. It does not protect from mosquitoes when applied to the skin.

Florida is a prime breeding place for mosquitoes, so keep yourself and your family safe by protecting yourselves against their bites. Cover 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 more information on mosquitoes and their control, call the Osceola County Extension Office at 321697-3000.
A little garden music

Add the sound of a water garden to your landscape and learn how to keep it from attracting mosquitoes with proper care. Attend the "Water Gardening" seminar at the Central Library at 7 p.m. Tuesday or 3 p.m. Wednesday. It will also be at the Buenaventura Lakes Library at 7 p.m. Thursday or 10 a.m. Saturday. Call 321-697-3000 to register for this free seminar.

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
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