

Tips to help Control Fleas



Fleas are back as a major pest in the United States. The most important flea pest is the cat flea. It attacks and annoys cats, as well as dogs. However, it has been found on more than 50 species of animals. The flea does not reproduce well on humans, so in the absence of pets and wild animals, flea populations don't increase inside human dwellings. Here are some important tips for control of cat fleas.

◆ **Survey your property for areas of excessive flea breeding.** Outdoors, flea larvae do not survive well in open sunny areas. They are going to be found in shaded, protected locations under trees, decks and sheds, and in crawl spaces of houses. The dry conditions allow the adult flea feces (basically dried blood) to accumulate. Adult flea feces are the primary food for flea larvae. Concentrate on finding areas where pets and wild animals rest or dig. These are the best areas for flea breeding.

◆ **Indoors, find the areas of major flea larval breeding.** Flea eggs are laid on the animal. They are not glued in place and fall off when the animal starts moving. Therefore, they are deposited where cats and dogs rest. Cats spend 80 percent of their time sleeping. That means at least 80 percent of the eggs are deposited where the animals rest. The larvae that hatch from the eggs are not going to move far. You can help our treatments by limiting the areas inside the house where your pet has access. That way the flea larval breeding is restricted to areas that we can easily treat.

◆ Make sure indoor places to be treated with spray solutions are thoroughly vacuumed and cleaned before we treat. The spray residuals will last longer on clean surfaces. Pet hair, food debris, dust and dirt absorb the insecticide you apply. If you vacuum or clean after we treat, you are removing our treatment and making it less effective.

◆ You should take your pets to a Veterinarian to obtain on-animal treatments.

◆ Flea cocoons protect pre-emerged adults from insecticide applications. Fleas emerge from their pupal cocoons when stimulated by the presence of a host. If a pet is removed from a house or apartment, all the larvae develop into adults inside the cocoon. They will stay there for months, waiting for a host. Once stimulated by vibration or carbon dioxide, they emerge and jump right onto a host. Our insecticide treatments are wasted unless you stimulated them to emerge. A vacuum cleaner with a beater bar will be great for getting fleas out of their cocoons so they can be killed.

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◆ **Adult flea feces are water soluble.** During droughts, flea populations build up because the feces is not dissolved in water, builds up, is consumed by larvae and eventually turns into thousands of adult fleas. Applying water to areas of flea breeding outdoors can disrupt flea larval development. You can spray water, or you can irrigate during drought times. The dry months of the year in Florida are from January to May. Daily rains usually being in June. Flea populations are greater until June when their larval food is washed away.

Cat fleas have large hind legs for jumping. They also have a large comb under the eyes and behind the head. They can move adeptly through the fur of the animal because their spines all point backward.

◆ We use an **insect growth regulator (IGR)** to control larval fleas. IGRs affect flea larvae and prevent them from developing into adults. They do not provide knockdown of adult flea populations. They prevent the development of adults that replace older fleas as they die off from old age or treatments with other types of insecticides.

◆ Adult fleas can be knocked down and killed with residual products, like pyrethroids. Because fleas have resistance to many pyrethroids, synergists should be added to the residual spray. We create a tank mix of adulticide products with IGRs to provide a greater spectrum of activity.

◆ Eliminate wild animal access to your yard, crawl spaces and underneath decks. Even people without pets can have flea problems. When you walk from your car to the house, fleas from the wild animals can jump on you. The fleas then can be carried into the house.

Source: *Florida Pest Pro*, June 2012. Phil Koehler is a professor and Roberto Pereira is an associate research scientist, both with the University of Florida-IFAS's Entomology and Nematology Department in Gainesville. *Excerpts taken and revisions made from, "University of Florida update, by Phil Koehler and Roberto Pereira"*.