



Don't Let Ticks Spoil Summer Fun

How to Reduce Your Risk of Being Bitten

Summer is almost here. If you are out and about in your landscape like me, be sure to look out for ticks. Please read what Dr. Graham Hickling from UT Center for Wildlife Health has to say about ticks. He is our guest contributor for this month.

Ticks “tick off” just about everyone. They are known carriers of disease most notably in Tennessee Ehrlichiosis and Rocky Mountain Spotted fever, but many are becoming increasingly concerned about Lyme disease as well. Researchers with the University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture have practical advice for reducing your risk- and the risk to your children and pets – of being bitten.

These two tick species are of primary concern in Tennessee: the Lone Star tick (recognizable by the distinctive white spot on the back of females) and the American Dog tick, which is really not particular about which animals or humans it bites. Hickling and his co-authors recently undertook a large survey of Lone Star ticks that found none infected with the Lyme disease agent. “Given that result, we are increasingly confident that blacklegged ticks, also called deer ticks, are the only species spreading Lyme disease in Tennessee,” he said.

Blacklegged ticks are present in most Tennessee counties, but in much lower numbers than Lone Star ticks or American Dog ticks. Hickling added, “Of the 1,000+ that we have checked, so far only two from Middle Tennessee have tested positive for the Lyme bacteria. So, the risk of contracting Lyme disease in Tennessee is not zero, but it is much, much lower than in the Northeast and Upper Midwest,” he said.

Hickling also noted that blacklegged tick adults are active in Tennessee in the fall through early spring, rather than in the summer.

In addition to commercial products that repel insects when properly applied to the skin or clothing, Hickling says there are some simple maintenance tasks that can help homeowners keep ticks at bay. First he confirms that having a tidy lawn is key to reducing tick populations around the home. “Keeping grass mowed and removing leaf litter, brush and tall weeds from around the home and at the lawn’s edge, will help reduce tick populations in areas where humans and pets tend to congregate,” he said.

Also, adding gravel, woodchips or dry mulch as paths can help keep ticks away from landscaped areas and children’s play structures. If tick problems become severe, he recommends employing a pest management company to apply a chemical barrier treatment around such areas.

Hickling also recommends adding landscape plants that are not attractive to deer and other wildlife. You can also deter some wildlife species from your yard with a fence, he says. Ticks are frequent hitchhikers on wildlife.

Protecting your pets can involve treatments recommended by your veterinarian, but you can also minimize the time that dogs and cats spend outdoors in areas with leaf litter, brush and tall weeds. Always check your pets for ticks when they come back indoors. Hickling recommends you discuss the issue with your veterinarian and learn the signs your pet might exhibit if affected by a tick-borne disease.

For more information about ticks and tick removal, visit the websites for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([cdc.gov/ticks](https://www.cdc.gov/ticks)) and the Companion Animal Parasite Council ([capcvet.org/capc-recommendations/ticks](https://www.capcvet.org/capc-recommendations/ticks)) Hickling also recommends the website TickEncounter Resource Center ([tickencounter.org](https://www.tickencounter.org)) because it provides information by region.



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