

Making Ripples

Protect Pets Naturally

by Amanda Bancroft

Pet owners who welcome winter as a break from fleas might be disappointed to know that fleas don't hibernate. But winter is an ideal time to combat fleas, since cold weather slows their life cycle. Since traditional flea powders and collars often contain harsh chemicals that aren't 100% safe for pets, especially for use around children, you might consider alternative remedies for prevention and treatment.

Fleas can still thrive in winter, especially inside your home or in outdoor places your pets would select for a nap out of the cold, like leaf piles or under porches. "Fleas can easily survive a Fayetteville winter and can breed and lay eggs in near perfect conditions in your home," says the Fayetteville Animal Medical Clinic located at 3045 North Market Avenue. The best way to stop a flea problem is to stop the life cycle, since only 5% of the flea population consists of adults. "The real problem is the remaining population made up of 50% eggs, 30% larvae and 15% pupae."

There are a few maintenance strategies that can help as both prevention and to break the life cycle: regular vacuuming combined with washing your bedding, clothes, and removable furniture covers all help to eliminate the eggs. Using a flea comb helps remove adult fleas from pets' fur. You could even make your own herbal flea collar from essential oils like peppermint, citronella, eucalyptus, rosemary, and white cedar! Be careful about using essential oils with cats, though.

For product ideas, visit the National Resources Defense Council's pet website, GreenPaws.org, for a list of products and their ingredients - tetrachlorvinphos or propoxur, two common toxic chemicals in flea products, should be avoided.

Beware of using garlic as a flea repellent for pets. While garlic might help humans avoid flea bites, it's actually toxic to pets, even if it does work to prevent fleas from biting pets, too. Many natural flea repellent remedies call for garlic without questioning its safety, as long as only small doses are given based on your pet's weight, but according to the ASPCA, "all close members of the onion family (shallots, onions, garlic, scallions, etc.) contain compounds that can damage dogs' red blood cells if ingested in sufficient quantities. The damage generally doesn't become apparent until three to five days after a dog eats these vegetables." In some animals, you might notice digestive upset or no symptoms at all, especially with small regular doses of garlic that can harm your pet's cells over time. And cats are 6-8 times more sensitive than dogs. Scientific studies on allium species (onions and garlic) poisoning back up these claims, although plenty of pet owners notice improvement in their pets' health after using garlic. But you aren't required to *feed* the animal garlic to repel fleas: just rubbing it into their fur has been known to work, without the toxicity concerns.

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