

Keep the Insects Away - Naturally

Do your campers come to camp with a bottle of DEET to fend off the insects? Because, when it comes to keeping the insects away, there is nothing like putting something on your body that can strip paint! While DEET (N,N-diethylmeta-toluamide) may be the most potent chemical deterrent of insects, it is also, well, the most potent chemical deterrent of insects. So what are the safer options?

Insects are relentless – they can see a person, smell a person and even sense someone's body heat. With these powerful senses, how can one keep them away?

Next time you make a trek in the woods, don't fret the insects or the repellent with its chemicals that may or may not be healthy for your skin. You can still keep the insects from bothering and biting, and do it naturally. Here are six natural insect repellents to consider.

- 50-100 mgs. of b-complex daily
- avoid scented personal care products
- avoid bright colors
- avoiding eating bananas during trek or before time outside (insects are attracted to the nectar through your skin)
- use scented oils – cedar, citronella, lavender, eucalyptus, peppermint, lemon, lemon balm, and tea-tree (the scent repels insects).
- eat garlic (although you might want to be on a solo!)
- penny royal – a potent herb in the mint family which can also be used to make a flea powder for pets. **Important note:** should not be used by a pregnant woman – penny royal is an abortifacient and can cause miscarriage.

In addition to the natural repellents listed, there are some new organic repellents on the market – some making use of the oils mentioned. They are listed here.

- **Repel Lemon Eucalyptus**; key ingredients: oil of lemon and eucalyptus. Has been tested effective for 6-8 hours. For more information, see www.destinationoutdoors.com.

- **Badger Anti-Bug Balm**; key ingredients: extra virgin olive oil, castor oil, beeswax, and essential oil of Eucalyptus citriodora. Tested in the Appalachians to work up to 4 hours. See www.badgerbalm.com
- **Cactus Juice Insect Protection**; key ingredient: prickly pear cactus extract. Reportedly repels insects for six hours per application and contains SPF-20 sunscreen. Check out the website www.cactusjuicetm.com.
- **Natrapel**; key ingredient: citronella. This repellent is not greasy and is effective up to 2 hours. Contact www.tenercorp.com.
- **Green Ban**; key ingredients: citronella, lavender, cajeput, peppermint, myrth, and galbanum. Effective in Australian rainforests up to 4 hours. See www.greenban.com.

So drop the DEET and forget about the myth of Avon Skin-So-Soft (it did not pass this writer's test in the north woods of Minnesota). Teach your campers and staff about these natural insect deterrents and help them enjoy their outdoor camp experience – naturally.

(resources: *Backpacker* magazine, April 2001; Holly Bellebuono, medical herbalist, Boone, NC)