

Get Ready for the Mosquito Population Explosion

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

If you haven't noticed them yet, you soon will. Given the recent rains, the mosquito population is about to explode. Generation time for mosquitoes, in summer conditions like this, is between 7 and 10 days. The first generation, after the rains started, is already active and the second generation isn't going to be too far behind so just get ready!

Additionally, late summer is the time when many of the insect borne illnesses, like West Nile Virus, really start to get cranked up. After all the big media attention to West Nile over the past ten years, it seems to have fallen off of many folk's radar screen, but it is still something to be concerned about. There are several other diseases that can be transmitted by mosquitoes, although none of them are nearly as common as West Nile Virus.

Many people still think that area wide spraying and fogging is the way to deal with mosquitoes. The truth is that fogging and wide area spraying just doesn't really do that much good. It is far more important to deal with mosquito breeding areas and then concentrate on personal protection for yourself and your family.

Mosquitoes like shallow water, preferably with emerged vegetation, to lay their eggs. With generation times commonly less than ten days, there are many areas in everyone's yard where mosquitoes can breed. Bird baths and pet watering bowls need to be emptied and cleaned out about every five days. Saucers under pots likewise need to be cleaned every five days. Some species of mosquitoes are very attracted to those saucers under the potted plants.

But look for other places that water may stand. Sagging gutters are a common breeding location. Small ponds in backyards, even if they have recirculating pumps, can breed mosquitoes. Fish in these ponds may not be an effective control of mosquito larvae. Consider using "dunks" or "donuts" in these areas. Dunks and donuts are made up of naturally occurring bacteria that will control the mosquito larvae. You can buy these at hardware stores, they are safe to use around fish, pets and aquatic plants. Once placed in the water, you don't have to treat again for the rest of the summer. Shallow ponded areas, that can not be drained, can also be treated with the mosquito dunks.

Ultimately it comes down to personal protection to avoid mosquitoes. Most people think that personal protection means insect repellents, but there are many other things. Make sure that screens on windows and doors don't have holes and fit tight. Place mosquito netting over infant carriers when outside. Wear long sleeves and long pants to reduce skin exposure. Mosquitoes can bite through clothing so be sure to treat clothing with DEET or permethrin. Avoid being outdoors at dusk and dawn as that is when mosquitoes are most active. Ultrasound devices or carbon dioxide devices that are advertised for mosquito control are not effective.

For skin treatment DEET is the most effective. Maximum effectiveness is reached with products containing about 30% DEET. Higher concentrations do not give longer protection. Kids should only be treated with lower concentration products. Other products that don't use DEET may offer some protection, but for much shorter periods of time. Products containing soy oil are good for kids but protection is generally only for an hour to 90 minutes. Re-apply repellents as directed and once you go inside, wash off treated skin to reduce the chance of having a skin reaction to the repellent.