

Mosquitoes Are Abundant and More Are On The Way

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

If you have been outside lately, especially on a nice calm evening, you may have noticed that there are a few mosquitoes around. Unfortunately, that situation is not going to get better in the near future. With continuing rains and saturated soils we are just going to have more standing water and standing water in the summer time means mosquitoes.

Kansas has over 50 species of mosquitoes. While some species are far more common and widespread, they all have a few things in common. They bite, they reproduce quickly in standing water and they all can carry disease causing organisms. It is important to realize that most mosquitoes do not carry these disease risks. None the less, it is important, for personal comfort if no other reason, to protect yourself from mosquito bites.

Many people feel that the way to deal with mosquitoes is to do large area spraying or fogging. While a lot of that has been done over the years, researchers have found that ultimately it just doesn't help that much as there are so many places that mosquitoes hide during the day that are never reached by the insecticides. Mosquitoes can travel 1/4 mile or further to find a meal. Spraying your backyard is unlikely to help reduce the number of mosquitoes at your next backyard gathering.

A better approach is to reduce breeding areas. Mosquitoes breed in shallow water, preferably with emerged vegetation which helps keep the water calm. How fast the mosquito larva develop depends on the temperature. Early in the season it may take several weeks to go from egg to biting adult, but this time of year it can happen in as little as seven days! Look around your property for any standing water. Pet water dishes and bird baths should be dumped and cleaned every four or five days. Dump water from pots or drainage saucers. Make sure gutters are draining dry after it rains. Look for anything that can hold water and dump it or make it unable to hold water for a week or longer.

In standing water that can't be drained there are other options. There are numerous natural products that contain bacteria which specifically attack mosquito larva. These go by several names but they are commonly just called mosquito dunks. They look like small donuts and are tossed into standing water. Some are even labeled for use in fish ponds. Large bodies of water that are several feet deep with lots of wave action seldom serve as breeding sites for mosquitoes.

Ultimately, personal protection is your best approach. Wear long sleeves and pants. Stay in areas where there is wind blowing (you can even use a fan on your deck to keep mosquitoes at bay). Avoid the gimmicks, the wrist bands, the lotions not really labeled for mosquito control as they honestly don't work. Mosquitoes hone in on carbon dioxide and body temperature. Some people don't seem to be as readily bitten because they have cooler body temperatures or give off less carbon dioxide than those around them.

Repellents containing DEET have historically been our best protection against all biting insects. Use products containing at least 8% DEET but no more than 30%. Newer products on the market that appear to be as effective as DEET contain 20% Picaridin or 30% oil of lemon eucalyptus. Products containing other plant oils just haven't shown to give much protection in testing. So enjoy the summer, but protect yourself from mosquitoes (and ticks and chiggers!).