

Selecting the Right Insect Repellent for Your Family

The Spring rains not only has filled our lakes and made our lawns green. It also has brought in an influx of mosquitos and ticks.

Insect repellent is our best defense against the many mosquitos, ticks, chiggers and whatever other insect that may, be out there. Before selecting an insect repellent, you should have an idea of what to look for. Insects can be annoying and can pose serious health risks.

When comparing insect repellents, it is important to consider the form, concentration, active ingredients, cost per use, type of insects repelled, as well as other factors use, odor and how the product feels on the skin. It is important to purchase products that are approved for use by the Environmental Protection Agency.

Always read labels carefully to determine any special precautions in using the products. When using on children, apply it to your hands; then put it on the child. Also, do not spray in closed areas, avoid breathing the spray and do not use near food.

Aerosol and pump-spray products are intended for skin applications and clothing. Liquid, cream, lotion, spray and stick products can be applied directly on the skin.

Products with a low concentration of active ingredients may be appropriate for situations with minimal insect exposure. Higher concentrations of active ingredients may be useful in highly infested areas or with insect species that are more difficult to repel. Products that contain high concentration of active ingredients such as DEET provide longer-lasting protection.

There are a variety of chemicals that are used to repel biting insects and ticks. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention, recommends three most active ingredients in repellents are DEET, picaridin and oil of eucalyptus. DEET and picaridin are considered the most effective active ingredients.

DEET is the most effective repellent recommended. It has broad-spectrum activity and is effective against many insects and ticks. For casual use, a product containing 10 to 30 percent DEET should be adequate. It can provide protection from two to eight hours. For children, it is best to be conservative and keep the concentration of DEET at 10 percent or less.

DEET can damage plastics, leather and synthetic fabrics. Take care applying repellents with deep to clothing.

Some DEET products include: Off Deep Woods, Repel Insect Repellent and Off Skintastic for Kids.

Picaridin has four to eight hours of effectiveness, but many people prefer it to DEET because it is odorless, does not irritate, is not greasy and does not damage plastics or synthetics.

Some products containing picaridin include Cutter Advanced Insect Repellent, Avon Skin-so-Soft Bug Guard Plus Picaridin and Off Family Care Insect Repellent.

Oil of lemon eucalyptus is a bio-repellent derived from natural materials. It supplies six hours of protection. Products containing lemon eucalyptus should not be used on children under the age of 3 years old. A few of the oil of lemon eucalyptus products include Repel Lemon Eucalyptus Insect Repellent Lotion and Cutter Lemon Eucalyptus Insect Repellent.

The CDC does not recommend using products that combine DEET with sunscreen. Sunscreens should be used more often than insect repellents with DEET. Sunscreen should be applied first, then the insect repellent containing DEET.

Source: Center for Disease Control and Prevention and Texas AgriLife Extension Service