

# Dr. Bug's "Bugbytes"

BY ROBERT CAMERON  
SPECIAL TO THE COMPASS

## Mosquitoes

The list of devices, remedies and methods for controlling pests is almost endless and those promoted for controlling mosquitoes are near the top. I am frequently asked how to prevent or eliminate mosquitoes. The short answer is that you can't. Mosquito abatement agencies or companies can reduce mosquito populations but this is not currently being carried out in Southern Ontario. Controlling these pests on your own property can be very difficult. The list of products and devices that have been shown through testing and research to be ineffective includes bug zappers, ultrasonics, citronella type plants, vitamin B, and bats and purple martins.

The use of foggers or power sprayers can be effective for treating limited areas such as for backyard parties or weddings. Results however are very short lived and dependent on weather and the terrain around the function area. Controlled release devices can be effective in certain situations but are influenced by many variables and can be expensive.

You can reduce mosquito-breeding sites around your property by eliminating potential sources. Anything that can hold water for extended periods can act as a breeding site. Things such as tin cans, plastic containers, pots, old tires, pool covers or other tarps, stagnant pools or ponds, deep wheel ruts can all act as a breeding source. Look over your property for these types of sites.

Protecting yourself is your best line of defense. This includes:

- avoiding outside activity at dawn and dusk if possible during peak biting season
- wear long sleeve, loose fitting shirts and long pants
- wear a bug net type hat
- use an insect repellent. Many repellents contain DEET, and the higher the concentration, the more effective they will be
- for longer term, screen in porches or gazebos

In Ontario, mosquitoes are considered mostly a nuisance because of their bites. They are of course capable of carrying disease. In the early years, when our canals were being dug, malaria was present in Ontario. Workers who had contracted the disease while working in tropical countries and then came to work in Ontario passed it on after being bitten by local mosquitoes. We had an outbreak of St. Louis encephalitis in Ontario in 1976 with several human deaths. Last summer there was an outbreak of West Nile virus in New York State with 61 severe cases and 7 deaths. These two types of encephalitis are similar and are spread by mosquitoes and wild birds. If a mosquito bites an infected bird and then a human, the disease can then be passed on to the human. At least 18 bird species examined by the CDC have tested positive for the virus including crows, blue jays, robins and red-tailed hawks with crows being the most heavily infected. Domestic animals such as cats, dogs and horses have also tested positive for the virus. Tests have shown that the virus has survived over the winter in New York State. It is too soon to tell yet if it will be a problem again this summer or if it might spread north into Ontario. Weather conditions will be an important factor. The heavy rain-falls we have been experiencing this spring provide ideal breeding conditions for mosquitoes.

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