

Warm weather equals lots of bugs

Common sense and bug know-how help ease the tradition of summer

The warm weather is upon us which means one thing - mosquitoes and black flies are now emerging for their annual feast upon the flesh of Canadians.

This blood-thirsty welcoming committee has always been a part of summer said Dr. Gord Surgeoner, a Guelph University entomologist and one of Canada's leading mosquito authorities.

"Mosquitoes were one of the country's earliest settlers and are as Canadian as hockey and maple syrup."

Some scientists say Canada's mosquitoes and black flies are the fiercest biting insects on the planet.

Early travellers in Canada were plagued by them and many wrote about being driven to total distraction by these biting swarms.

In 1785, one Canadian explorer wrote "A sailor, finding swearing of no use, tried what tar could do and covered his face with it, but the musketoos stuck to it in such numbers as to blind him..."

Even the hearty voyageurs, the toughest characters of the time, were not immune and were often reduced to near-hysteria.

Today, we don't need to resort to such remedies.

Use repellent with DEET

Mosquitoes and black flies are attracted mainly by carbon dioxide or infrared radiation - two things we all emit.

The most effective bug repellents are the ones with the active ingredient DEET - the only substance recommended by Health Canada's Health Protection Branch and the World Health Organization.

Repellents are designated with a PCP number which is the consumer's assurance that the repellent meets or exceeds stipulated repellency and safety standards.

Dr. Surgeoner said the length of time a repellent remains effective varies with the level of active ingredients, thoroughness of application and the type of outdoor activity.

To get the most out of your repellent, apply a light, even coating to any exposed skin, as areas left untreated - even as small as a dime - continues to be susceptible to bites.

Bug facts

Canadian mosquitoes are considered among the most aggressive of the world's estimated 3,000 species.

There are 1,200 species of black flies worldwide. Ten percent of black flies are found commonly in Canada.

But armed with a simple game plan based on common sense and insect know-how, you can have the winning edge in this age-old contest.

→ Mosquitoes breed in standing water. Any container that creates even small stagnant pools of water - can make your backyard a haven for mosquitoes.

→ Mosquitoes live fast and die hard. The average life span of a mosquito is two weeks, but some females live up to five months or more.

Throughout its lifetime, a mosquito can bite up to five times and she will lay up to 200 eggs after each bite. Male mosquitoes are the first to hatch, but never bite.

→ When a mosquito bites, saliva is injected into the victim, to help extract the blood. This is what causes the itching sensation.

A female mosquito will suck out about five-millionths of a litre of blood



themselves.

→ Black fly populations tend to peak in late May and early June: in more northern areas of Canada, the season can extend into late October or the first pro-

longed frost. Black flies only bite in the early morning and late afternoon and on warm, overcast days.

find the tiniest openings and bite unprotected skin. Black flies rarely bite while indoors.

→ Black flies prefer cool, fast running streams as breeding and hatching habitats. They lay up to 500 eggs at a time and are known to fly up to 170 kilometres from their original nesting area.

→ Like the mosquito, black flies can discriminate between colors and tend to be drawn to darker shades. Dull surfaces are generally more attractive than glossy and reflective surfaces.

per bite.

→ A mosquito may fly as far as 500 km over its lifetime and can travel at a speed estimated at more than two km per hour.

The annoying whine is the wings fluttering up to 600 times a second.

→ Mosquito activity peaks at dawn and dusk, due to higher humidity, less sunlight and a drop in wind.

→ Only female black flies bite. Actually they use their saw-like teeth to scrape the skin surface and then lick the blood from the wound.

The males concentrate on buzzing about and making a nuisance of

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