

# [ FLEAS ]

## TAKING THE BITE OUT OF FLEAS

BY INGRID KING

**A** We've had a particularly bad flea season that seems like it's not about to abate any time soon. The warm, humid weather coupled with lots of rain brings these pesky and almost microscopic pests in abundance. We can do one of two things – throw a whole bunch of chemicals like sprays and spot-on treatments and even seal up our homes and let off chemical 'bombs' or we can try a gentler and more holistic approach.

### HOW TO CONTROL FLEAS AND TICKS WITHOUT CHEMICALS

Many of the flea and tick treatments available today contain chemicals that can be hazardous to pets and to people. In the United States, the Environmental Protection Agency, in coordination with the Food and Drug Administrations Center for Veterinary Medicine, is pursuing a series of actions to increase the safety of spot-on products for pets. These actions are designed to help consumers use these pesticides safely. Although many spot-on treatments are instantly effective many pet owners prefer to limit the use of these products or are looking for more natural alternatives instead. There are safer, natural ways to control fleas. They may require a bit more effort on your part, but isn't that effort worth it if it's safer for you and your pet?

### COMBING

Use a good flea comb with tightly spaced teeth. Comb your pet daily during flea season and drop any fleas you find into a bowl of soapy water to kill them.

### BATHING

Bathe your pet with a gentle shampoo such as oatmeal-based product. There are some very effective flea shampoos on the market that aren't as harsh as some of the old fashioned ones that have been around for ages. A good source of information on what is effective and gentle would be a professional groomer. These professionals have their hands on product and their furry customers, so they know what effective without being harsh. Always a good idea to know what ingredients are in shampoos so ask a professional and read the fine print.

Fleas tend to accumulate in bedding, so wash your pet's bedding as well. A hot cycle is the best but read the manufacturers instructions on washing and care first.

### VACUUMING

Vacuum thoroughly, including on and under furniture and in crevices and near baseboards. Discard the vacuum bag immediately after vacuuming to prevent fleas and eggs from re-infesting your home. Severe infestations may require professional steam cleaning.

### DIET

Feeding a high quality, varied diet can help prevent fleas. A better diet leads to a stronger immune system, and it is believed that this can contribute to your pet being more resistant to fleas. Some pet owners who feed raw or homemade diets have reported that their pets no longer have flea problems.

### MAINTAIN OUTDOOR AREAS

Keep your grass mowed and keep shrubbery trimmed short in areas where your pet spends time. This will increase sunlight and dryness, which will help reduce the flea problem. Sprinkle diatomaceous earth in your yard to cut down on the flea population. Diatomaceous earth also makes a great natural pantry bug killer, it works for all insects. It's reported to be safe around pets, but don't sprinkle it directly on your pet.



**FEEDING A HIGH QUALITY, VARIED DIET CAN HELP PREVENT FLEAS**



### NATURAL FLEA CONTROL PRODUCTS

There are numerous natural flea control products on the market, but not all of them are safe for pets. In particular, avoid using products containing essential oils such as Pennyroyal, Tea Tree or Citrus oils. None of these are safe to use around pets, especially around cats. The Lavender Cat ([www.thelavendercat.com](http://www.thelavendercat.com)) is an excellent website devoted to scientific research about cats and essential oil safety. Some manufacturers of essential oils claim that their oils are pure and safe to use around cats, but quite frankly, I wouldn't take any chances on statements of that nature unless they're backed up by research by an independent toxicologist.

The National Resource Defense Council's Green Paws website ([www.greenpaws.org](http://www.greenpaws.org)) has a comprehensive [www.simplesteps.org/greenpaws-products](http://www.simplesteps.org/greenpaws-products) directory of flea and tick products, including natural products, and lists ingredients and toxicity warnings.

Following these tips will help keep your pets safe not just from fleas and ticks, but also from harmful chemicals.

Ingrid King is the author of Buckley's Story - Lessons from a Feline Master Teacher. She is a former veterinary hospital manager turned writer. Her online magazine "News for You and Your Pet" goes out to subscribers around the world. Her blog, "The Conscious Cat," has been called "educational cat nip for the cat lover" and is a comprehensive resource for conscious living, health and happiness for pets and their people. For more information about Ingrid and Buckley's Story, please visit [www.ingridking.com](http://www.ingridking.com)



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