

THE HERBAL CONTROL OF Insects, including fleas and lice: Charissa Smith BVSc MPhil

Controlling insects with herbs reduces the effect of chemicals on other insects and plants, and the soil, air and water. It reduces the load chemicals place on the pet's immune system. It provides a cheap, present source of insect control. There is not the 100% kill of insects that chemicals afford before the insects become resistant. Herbal control of insects needs hygiene and repetition to be effective. Herbs, which grow in a local area, will be more effective, and these herbs will be more effective at certain times of the year. Herbs can be harvested, dried and used when needed. Grow where you are planted!!!!

Fleas

Light flea burdens occur because

1. Fleas cannot live and breed easily in the home and garden. This means nowhere for the flea to hide, fleas hide in soft soil, sand and carpet, and cracks in old flooring. They cannot hide in tiles and lino. Exposure to sunlight kills fleas and lice.

Only 10% of a pet's flea burden is present at one time on the pet,

Fleas and lice live in the pet's environment. The pet is dinner, not home, to the flea. The pet is home to lice. Depleted soils e.g. of sulphur, are attractive to fleas.

2. The pet is not attractive to fleas or lice.

3. The owner and pet have regularly removed the pet's fleas and lice.

In summer, a pet may need to be bathed once or twice a week in an herbal tea or even combed daily. Herbs contain low levels of detergents compared to chemical shampoos and do not remove oils from the coat. If the pet is very dirty, the worst of the dirt should be combed out or washed out with lukewarm rainwater before the herbal treatment.

Treating the Home and Garden:

Grow herbs among the other plants.

Grow herbs in window boxes inside the house.

Wash the floors and cement with herbal teas and/or hot water with added herbal oils. Replace carpets with mats, which can be easily cleaned and aired in the sun.

Treat mats with dried herbs and vacuum regularly before sunning.

Herbs can be crushed, dried and sprinkled on mats, then left for 24 hours before vacuuming.

Place dried herbs in pillows on which the dogs and cats sleep.

Put dried herbs under the mattresses and sheets and cushions where dogs and cats sleep.

Sprinkle dried herbs around skirting boards.

Put dried herbs or herbal teas in all the spots where the dogs sleep in the garden.

When preparing a new garden bed, rake dried herbs into the soil.

If there is a neighbour who has no flea control, plant a solid bank of herbs along the adjoining fences.

Use herbal oils in burners.

HERBS with insect affecting properties include:

Group 1. Rosemary, Oregano, Basil: Safe for internal use

Group 2. Fennel and Lemon Grass, Pennyroyal, Billygoats buttons, Lavender, Thyme. Eucalyptus. (In pregnancy, do not use Pennyroyal or Thyme.)

Group 3. Verbena, Eclipta, Plantain, Dock, Sorrel. Weeds, all safe for internal use.

Group 4. Tansy and Pyrethrum daisy, Wormwood and Rue and Neem, and Cedar. Not recommended for internal use. Tansy and Pyrethrum daisy are for planting only. Rue and wormwood can be used as a dried herb in pillows and floors, not as a skin wash.

None of group 4 should be used in Aromatherapy.

Having said this, for mosquito control in the house, shut out the animals, and use a few drops of cedar oil in an aromatherapy burner for the day. Remember pets are on the floor, and herbal oils in burners are concentrated near the floor where small children and pets live. You can wash the floors and spray mattresses with cedar and neem oil solutions. Cedar appears to be effective in cold climate flea control, used diluted as a rinse in dogs. It does not seem effective on its own in hot climates, where the neem is more effective. Cedar can be liver toxic and allergenic, Neem may cause hormonal imbalance. Both are better used as environmental control rather than directly on the pet. Both have some tick repellent ability.

Group 5. Garlic, Coriander, Mint, Chives, Savory. Good for planting and as part of bathing, and giving internally. These are good digestive herbs and make the animal stronger. They can be part of an herbal planting program but are not anti flea.

When making environmental treatments, use at least one herb from each group.

MAKING THE PET UNATTRACTIVE TO Insects:

A diet rich in Vitamin B, minerals and fatty acids reduces flea burdens.

Flaxseed oil is a cheap source of fatty acids.

Dose is 1 ml per 10 kg of body weight. Many pets need more than this. For higher doses, consult your vet.

Brewer's yeast and liver are good sources of vitamin B.

Dose: One teaspoon of yeast per 10 kg and one dessertspoon of cooked liver per 20 kg body weight.

Yeast should not be given to animals with fungal infection; liver should not be given if the animal has pancreatitis.

Minerals come from marrowbones and vegetables.

Bones should be given raw daily. Cooked bones splinter. Ham bones are particularly dangerous.

Vegetables in small amounts e.g. 1 dessertspoon of cooked vegetable, or 1 teaspoon of grated raw vegetable per 10 kg pet. Animals will eat vegetables to fulfil needs, they will often refuse them once the need is met, and return to them again later.

TREATING THE PET:

Flea collars can be made with herbal oils.

Flea sprays can be made with herbal tea, oils, and water.

Herbs, fresh, dried and as oils and extracts, can be used as bath additives.

Dried herbs can be combed through the coat.

Diluted herbal oils can be combed through the coat.

Aromatherapy mixtures can be made:

Stimulants: Sage, Eucalyptus, Thyme, Tea tree

Sedatives: Oregano, Basil, Lavender, Chamomile

Treat the pet, not the fleas.

A sample recipe for fleas in a slightly agitated non-pregnant pet with redness of the skin and a few fleas:

2 drops of lavender oil, 1 drop of pennyroyal oil, 2 drops of eucalyptus oil, 25 mls of almond oil. Mix well. Vary oils as needed.

FLEA COLLAR:

Take a cloth collar. Every 1 cm around the collar, add 2 to 4 drops of this recipe. Put the collar in a plastic bag and let the oil diffuse through the collar. Let it sit for 24 hours, then place around the pet's neck. When the oils no longer smell, rejuvenate as above. A cloth collar can be made by binding padding over an old leather collar, or plaiting thick cotton and weaving a collar.

FLEA SPRAY 1:

Add 10 drops of 2 drops of lavender oil, 1 drop of pennyroyal oil, 2 drops of eucalyptus oil, and 25 mls of almond oil. Mix well. Vary oils as needed to 2 cups of hot water and one dessertspoon of lemon juice or white vinegar in a 500 ml spray bottle.

Shake well. When cool, spray on the coat and comb gently though with a fine toothcomb.

FLEA SPRAY 2:

A recipe for a more agitated pet with less inflammation

Soak one dessertspoon of fresh herbs e.g. a mix of lavender, verbena and basil or lemon scented gum leaves, in 2 cups of hot water for 20 minutes, strain, put in spray bottle and use as above.

Crush the herbs before pouring the water on them.

Single herbs or combinations may be used. Pennyroyal is not recommended in pregnant animals where Rosemary and Basil are pleasant. Be guided by the pet's reactions. Lavender is always good. A little fennel may increase the milk supply.

BATHS:

Crush the herbs as above, pour on the hot water, and allow them to infuse for 10 minutes. Pour the infusion into the lukewarm bath and wash the pet. Do not wash a pet with anything that it cannot take internally as it will lick it off. I do not use eucalyptus and pennyroyal oils in baths, although I will use the fresh herbs where the delivery of volatile oils is less. A drop of rosemary and sage oil in a bath is sufficient. Allow the herbs to dry in the coat.

ALLERGIES:

All substances may induce allergies, especially if associated with unpleasant experiences. The effect on the nerve sheath is part of the pathology of allergies. Try to make your flea treatment as pleasant as possible for your pet. If your pet is allergic to an herb, it will develop a rash within 24 hours. If you have a pet which has allergies, try a small quantity of herb first and apply it only to a 20-cent diameter area of skin. Wait 48 hours and assess the reaction.