



(Above) The skeeters are out but hopefully you will not need a bug suit like this to keep them away. Mosquito repellent that works best will contain at least 20 percent DEET. (Special to the Montrose Daily Press/ Mark Rackay)

The skeeters are back

Scientists have been real busy lately with trying to put a person on Mars and seeing that the planet once had water. If Mars once had water, I am sure it had mosquitoes too. Whenever science quits fooling around with space travel, atoms and molecules and takes to the business at hand, like getting rid of mosquitoes and the common cold, we will be getting somewhere.

If you are outdoors hiking, fishing, hunting, bike riding or just about any other activity, a horde of mosquitoes can really wreck your day. I am sure that Mother Nature and Murphy teamed up to use mosquitoes against us. I have always questioned Noah's wisdom about bringing a breeding pair onto the ark.

Problem is that mosquitoes, while a nuisance, can carry diseases such as lyme, spotted fever, malaria, West Nile and others you are probably better off not knowing about. Most recently, mosquitoes have been responsible for the spread of the Zika virus. Catching one of these illnesses would certainly be best avoided, as any one of them can send your earthly carcass to paradise a bit ahead of schedule.

If someone were to ask me what the deadliest animal in the world was, I would have to consider the Big Five from the Dark Continent. Certainly the lion, elephant, leopard, Cape buffalo and hippopotamus must be at the top of the list. Even the crocodile comes to mind. Truth is, it is the mosquito. The lowly mosquito is a vector for so many deadly diseases, that it is responsible for about one million deaths annually.

Mosquitoes are at their worse during the early morning and early evening times. They seem to prefer dark clothing to light and hang out in the more shady areas, rather than in direct sunlight. It is best to wear long

sleeve clothing and full-length pants rather than shorts, though this can cause other physical problems when it is so hot outside. The thought of not wearing shorts when the skeeters are out seems like a no brainer to me.


There are almost 3,500 species of mosquitoes worldwide, but only a few hundred actually bite. Only the females bite because they need blood in order to lay eggs. Males don't bite and are happy to feed on plants.

The female mosquitoes lay their eggs in shallow standing water or damp soil that is prone to flooding. An irrigated field could be a breeding place for the little pests. One female can lay up to 300 eggs at a time, and the females will lay eggs three times before they die. Getting rid of any standing water around your home is a good start at keeping the population at bay.

A mosquito can eat up to three times its body weight in blood. While that is a lot, consider it would take 1.2 million bites to drain your body of the entire blood supply.

Mosquitoes do best when the temperature exceeds 80 degrees, and generally vanish when it's below 50 degrees. The bugs are cold-blooded and some species actually hibernate during the winter months. Some females will lay their eggs in freezing water and then die. The eggs will keep until temperatures rise, and then hatch, making sure we have a never-ending supply of the pests.

The works of Aristotle, which were written around 300 B.C., mentioned mosquitoes and being an annoyance way back then. The mosquito has been



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

around since the Jurassic period, around 210 million years ago. All the other dinosaurs became extinct, but for some reason these nuisance insects survived, just to drive us crazy.

The good news is that mosquitoes have a short lifespan. Females of the species that hibernate may live up to six months. Most female species make it six to eight weeks. The poor male, who does not bite anybody, usually only lasts around 10 days before cashing in.

The old standby for keeping mosquitoes at bay is a good coating of an insect repellent containing DEET (chemical name, N, N-diethyl-metoluamide for you chemical engineer types), in an amount of at least 20 percent. In extreme cases, such as marshlands, I have used 100 percent DEET and it works well. Some brands to consider include Off, Cutters, Sawyer and Ultrathon, to name a few.

Medical studies have shown that when you use DEET products properly, they do not cause any health risk. I know from experience that getting DEET on any type of Styrofoam cooler will cause the cooler to dissolve away. I try not to think about what it does to my skin but it is better than mosquito bites.

If you are a fisherman, never reach into a live well full of live bait if you have DEET on your hands or arms. The live well will quickly become a dead well. I learned this from experience in my years fishing the Everglades of Florida.

It is necessary to reapply the repellent every couple of hours. The skeeters will let you know when the last spraying is wearing off. It helps to give a

good spray on your clothes, hat, pants cuff, socks and sleeves, where these critters like to sometimes infiltrate.

There is a number of DEET free products available, some containing oil of lemon eucalyptus and others with a base of IR3535, such as Skin-So-Soft Bug Guard or Skinsmart. Personally, I have never had any success with these products. If the bugs are out and biting, I chose not to fool with stuff that may or may not work.

Some people can't stand the smell of DEET on their clothes or person. This would also include scent-conscious hunters in the early hunting seasons. For you folks there is a product called Permethrin.

You do not apply Permethrin on your skin but treat your clothes with it. The treatment will last several washings if you follow the directions on the can. It works fairly well and keeps you from smelling like a bug bomb. I have used it several times with success.

If a mosquito does bite you, avoid scratching it. Scratching and digging at the site of the bite will only make it worse. A small dose of a hydrocortisone cream or some calamine lotion will usually stop the itching.

Until science gets down to the real business at hand, and gets rid of these useless creatures, we will have to keep our carcasses coated in a rich layer of DEET. When we finally put an astronaut on Mars, I can only hope that mosquitoes eat him alive. Then NASA will finally do something about them.

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