

A Guide to Life: One in a series

Bugged? Here's how to get rid of mosquitoes

What works

- **Mosquito-trapping machines:** Mosquitoes are attracted to warmth and carbon dioxide. These expensive machines emit a moist cloud of carbon dioxide. Mosquitoes gather around, thinking it's a food source, and they're vacuumed up into a trap, where they dehydrate and die. Only biting insects have carbon dioxide receptors; beneficial insects (like ladybugs and moths) won't be attracted. The devices can protect a fairly large area, like your backyard. The cheaper machines use electricity; the pricier ones run on propane.
- **Larvicide:** Get to the mosquito eggs before they hatch. *Bacillus thuringiensis israelensis*, also known as "Bti" or "mosquito dunk", is a bacteria that kills the larvae. (It's harmless to pets and humans.) You can buy it in briquets (often doughnut-shaped). Toss it into standing water, where mosquitoes breed. By "standing water", we don't mean a pond, necessarily. A thimble-full of stagnant water is enough to breed thousands of mosquitoes.
- **Deet:** the repellent DEET (N, N-diethylmeta-toluamide) is the active ingredient in products such as Off! It's effective, but unpleasant to wear.
- **What sort of works**
- **Citronella products:** Citronella oil is the trendiest repellent these days. In stores, you'll find citronella candles, citronella incense and citronella wrist bands. It is effective, but only up close. If everyone's huddled around a picnic table, a candle or two will probably do the trick. But if there's much of a breeze, forget about it.
- **Exclusion:** Put up barriers so mosquitoes can't get to you. Close the screen door. If you have a deck, consider putting up screens.

What Doesn't Work

- **Citrosa plant:** Some people claim that this plant will repel mosquitoes because it's genetically engineered to contain citronella oil. It doesn't work - at least, not enough to make a difference. (You can get mosquito relief from a citrosa plant if you crush it up and rub it on your body.)
- **Bug zappers:** These attract bugs with ultraviolet light, then electrocute them with a loud pop. They kill mostly moths, beetles and beneficial insects; mosquitoes make up only a small percentage of victims.
- **Bats:** Bats eat mosquitoes, so many people believe a bat house in the backyard is the solution to the mosquito problem. But bats eat more moths and beetles than anything else. Mosquitoes are only a small part of their diet.

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