

## SAFETY TIPS DURING TICK SEASON

By Sharon Smart, Frederick County Extension Master Gardeners

It is now tick season in Maryland. Ticks are very active from spring until fall, and freezing weather does not kill them. These parasitic blood feeders are a serious pest. According to the University of Maryland Extension service, six species of ticks are most commonly found in Maryland. They include American dog ticks, deer (blacklegged) ticks, Lone Star ticks, Brown dog ticks, Gulf Coast ticks, and Asian long-horned ticks. The tick that is perhaps most important for people in our area to be aware of is the deer or blacklegged tick (*Ixodes scapularis*), which carries Lyme disease.

### What is Lyme disease?

According to the Johns Hopkins website ([hopkinsmedicine.org](http://hopkinsmedicine.org)): “Lyme disease is an infection caused by the bacteria *Borrelia burgdorferi*. The spiral-shaped bacterium is most commonly spread by a tick bite. The disease takes its name from Lyme, Connecticut...where the illness was first identified...in 1975.” Nearly 50 years later, cases of Lyme disease have been reported in nearly all U.S. states, plus areas of Europe and Asia.

Bacterial symptoms include “rash, fever, headache, and fatigue. But if it is not treated early, the infection can spread to your joints, heart, and nervous system,” according to [medlineplus.gov](http://medlineplus.gov). Not all ticks carry the disease, but those that do usually attach to their host for 36 to 48 hours or more before the host is infected. Since ticks cannot fly or jump, they cling to the tips of grasses and shrubs and climb onto a host that brushes by. Ticks will attach to any part of the human body and are often found in hard-to-see areas such as armpits, scalp, or groin.

### Keeping ticks away when you're outside

Prevention is key to reducing the chance of a tick bite. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends several repellants, both natural and chemical, such as oil of lemon eucalyptus, Permethrin, and Deet. Permethrin kills, Deet repels. Permethrin is used for clothing only, not skin, and will last through several washings. Deet can be sprayed on skin or pant legs, shoes or boots. For both, read and follow the label safety instructions. Another option is to buy clothes already treated with Permethrin. See the [cdc.gov/ticks](http://cdc.gov/ticks) for more information.

A final preventive measure is to wear light-colored clothing, which makes tick detection easier. Wear boots or close-toed shoes, and tuck your pant legs into your socks or boots.

Ticks are very small, so after coming inside, check your clothing and body for ticks. Check children, pets, and gear such as backpacks. Shower within two hours of coming inside, which has been shown to reduce your risk of getting Lyme disease.

### What if you find an attached tick?

You can remove an attached tick, using fine-pointed tweezers to grasp the tick at skin level and giving a firm, steady pull until it comes away. Treat the bite with an antiseptic, and save the tick in alcohol for identification. Make a record of the tick attachment site—you could sketch it on paper or take a photo with your cell phone or camera. Call your doctor if, within a few days, you develop a flu-like illness and/or a bullseye-like rash appears at the bite site.

### How do ticks fit into the food chain?

While ticks can be dreadful for humans, they are a food source for frogs, lizards, chickens, squirrels, opossums, guineafowl, wild turkeys, and ants. Some studies have shown that opossums can eat up to 5,000 ticks in one week. In addition, robins and some other ground-feeding birds eat ticks, so a bird-friendly yard may help to keep the tick population down.

Remember, with a few safety measures, such as those listed above, we can reduce the chances of being bitten by a tick.

For more information, go to:

- University of Maryland extension service, <https://extension.umd.edu>, Home and Garden Information. At the search box, click on “Ticks in Maryland” Then click on the article, “Ticks in Maryland.”
- Centers for Disease Control, <https://cdc.gov>. In the search box, enter the words “Ticks, Lyme disease”
- Johns Hopkins Medicine, <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org>. In the search box, enter: “Lyme disease, ticks”

Map showing the eastern range of the deer tick in the United States. (Photo courtesy of Sharon Smart, master gardener.)



Comparison of tick sizes, with the deer tick being the smallest, on left. (Photo courtesy of the California Department of Public Health.)



Photo courtesy: California Department of Public Health  
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Friends gather at a manmade waterfall: From top: A cowbird waits his turn while a robin fluffs feathers after taking a bath, and a mourning dove drinks from the waterfall. Groundfeeders such as the robin and mourning dove often dine on ticks—another good reason to attract birds to your yard. (Photo courtesy of Maritta Perry Grau, master gardener)



The University of Maryland Extension Frederick County’s Home Gardening/Master Gardeners Office is now open to the public. You can also find gardening information and advice online at:

- University of MD Extension Home & Garden Information Center, <https://extension.umd.edu/programs/environmentnatural-resources/program-areas/home-and-garden-information-center>;
- Frederick County Master Gardeners Publications, <http://extension.umd.edu/locations/frederick-county/home-gardening>;
- Facebook, <http://www.facebook.com/mastergardenersfrederickcountymaryland>;
- or call us at [301-600-1596](tel:301-600-1596).

*For more information about the Frederick County Extension Master Gardener/Horticulture Program, visit: <http://extension.umd.edu/locations/frederick-county/home-gardening> or call Susan Trice at the University of Maryland Extension Frederick County office, 301-600-1596.*

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