

~ Ask Granny Earth ~

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Mosquito repellent

ASK GRANNY EARTH

Lately, in our local newspaper, I read an article called, "West Nile virus spreading faster than expected". It advised using a mosquito repellent containing DEET. I've heard that DEET is not safe for children. What's your take on this and are there any herbal insect repellents I could use instead of products containing DEET?

DEET is the common name for *N,N-diethyl-m-toluamid*. DEET is a unique pesticide because it is applied directly to the human body for the purpose of repelling insects. It was developed and patented by the U.S. Army in 1946 for use by military personnel. DEET was then registered for general public use in the U.S. in the 1957.

Products containing *N,N-diethyl-m-toluamide* and isomers (DEET) are beneficial as insect repellents, but have also been associated with dermal (skin) irritation such as blisters and scarring (Reuveni and Yagupsky, 1982) and neurological damage including toxic encephalopathy with symptoms of agitation, weakness, disorientation, seizures, coma and death.

DEET is absorbed promptly through the skin and distributed to all organs including the brain and (in case of pregnancy) the fetus. *I gleaned this information from EXTOXNET, a Pesticide Information Project of Cooperative Extension Offices of Cornell University, Michigan State university, Oregon*

State University and University of California at Davis at their web site:
<http://pmep.cce.cornell.edu/profiles/extoxnet/carbaryl-dicrotophos/deet-ext.html>).

There are natural alternatives, but it takes a little more time and effort. As always, I urge you to do your own research and of course, listen to your innate healing wisdom.

In 1995 the National Poison Control Center in Washington, DC. received over 6,700 reports of (DEET) repellent exposure side effects, including one death. Of the 6,700 reports, two thirds occurred in children age six and under.
(www.quantumhealth.com)

I have never used insect repellents containing DEET and I would not recommend using them, especially on children. But with the recent threat of the West Nile virus, I can understand how most people will panic and reach for the DEET. However, there are a lot of precautions one can take to protect themselves against mosquitoes, such as getting rid of stagnant water around the yard and wearing protective clothing when going into the woods, or working in the garden. Last year during the heat of summer I would work in my garden from 7:00 until dark. Although this was more comfortable than mid-day, the mosquitoes were out in full force and anxious to bite. After getting pretty bite up the first time, I decided to pick some Sage and Chamomile leaves and rub them on my arms and face thereafter. It worked and the mosquitoes left me alone!

There are several natural alternatives to DEET products on the market, but they are slow to catch on and you have to go to a health food store, or on-line to get them. Granted the DEET formulas work longer (from 6 – 10 hours) than natural repellents, so you'll need to apply them more often if you're looking for extended protection. But, that's only an inconvenience with no toxic side effects. As with most natural, alternatives, there is always a little inconvenience. But what a small price to pay - don't you agree?

A trip to your local health food store (if you've never visited one) will open a whole new world of 'chemical-free' living for you. You can even find safe, herbal, no aluminum deodorants there!

It's no coincidence that Nature provides effective and gentle remedies for all of our needs, including mosquito repellent. If you have your own herb garden, you might want to experiment in making your own. Some herbs that are known to work are Lavender, Peppermint, Thyme, Citronella, Lemongrass, Chamomile Eucalyptus, Garlic, Basil, Rosemary and Sage. Use what you have growing. Make a strong herbal tea of the fresh leaves. Let the tea cool and either put it in a spray bottle or wipe it directly on the skin. Keep unused portion in the fridge and make a new batch every few days.

Mosquitoes especially dislike Lavender and Thyme oils. Use pure essential oil, and dilute it in a base of either water or carrier oil such as sweet almond, sesame, grape seed or safflower. Dilute 2-6 drops of the essential oil into 1 teaspoon of a base oil to use topically. To make a water-based splash, add 5-6 drops essential oil to 1 Tablespoon witch hazel and 4 Tablespoons filtered/spring water. Shake it well and spray on the skin.

One of the best formulas I have found to keep most bothersome insects away is: Thyme oil: 4 drops, Lavender oil: 4 drops, Peppermint: 4 drops.

Add this blend of oils to 2 Tablespoons witch hazel and 8 Tablespoons filtered or spring water. Shake well and spray onto skin. Re-apply as needed when outdoors. This is a good blend for children also. If you do happen to get bit, Tea Tree oil is always a good first choice, since it has antiseptic properties and reduces inflammation.