

Oh, Bother LEAVE ME ALONE!



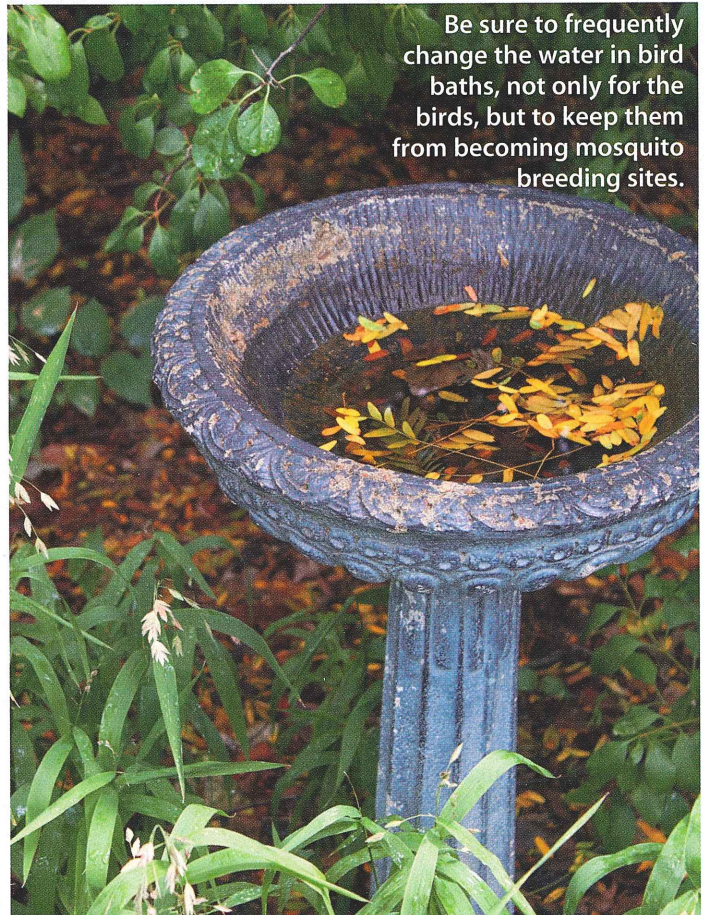
**Story & Photography By
Douglas A. Spilker, Ph.D.**

Take care, especially when deadheading flowers and picking up dropped fruit. Bees and wasps tend to hide when foraging.

There are 'garden pests' and then there are pests that bother you in the garden. Here's what to do about biting, stinging and troublesome insects.



Bites from the oak leaf itch mite occur when raking infested pin oak leaves. Wear long sleeves and gloves if raking before a killing frost.



Be sure to frequently change the water in bird baths, not only for the birds, but to keep them from becoming mosquito breeding sites.

Most pests in the home garden can be managed, but I don't like it when they bother me! Insects may bite or sting — but they don't do it to be mean. Biting and stinging behaviors are survival mechanisms for many insects and arthropods, and are generally related to obtaining food or for defense.

Take, for instance, the bite of a **mosquito**. The female mosquito needs a blood meal before it can lay eggs. Mosquito bites can be painful and in large numbers can limit pleasurable outdoor activities. Although adult mosquitoes are very evident, their tiny eggs are laid in standing water developing into larval "wigglers." Mosquitoes do not commonly fly very far, so elimination of mosquito breeding sites helps reduce mosquito problems around the home. Remove water-catching vessels, like old tires and pots, frequently change water in bird baths and clean out gutters holding stagnant water. Consider putting mosquito dunks (which contain *Bacillus thuringiensis*) in ponds to kill mosquito larvae. Although mosquitoes can bite at any time of the day, they tend to be more voracious at dawn and dusk.

Don't Give Them a Biting Chance

American dog ticks, black-legged (deer) ticks and lone star ticks all can pose a threat, not only from their blood-



After a walk in the woods, not only do a "tick check" of yourself, but your pet, too. Ticks like the soft skin inside dogs' ears and between their toes.

feeding, but also because they may be a vector for diseases such as Lyme disease. Understanding tick behavior can help you avoid being bitten. The tick waits for a suitable host by perching on tips of vegetation. To evade ticks, stay away from overhanging brush and tall grass, especially at edges of woody areas and along trails. Prompt, careful inspection and removal of ticks is an important method of preventing disease. Don't forget to check your pets, too.

No other pest bite causes more misery for its size than the tiny **chigger** (aka jigger). Bites of the common chigger, a mite, result in small, reddish welts that begin itching intensely within 24 hours. Chigger larvae crawl from tips of leaves onto people and feed especially where the skin is thin, such as ankles, armpits and backs of knees. They are most prevalent in early summer when grass and weeds get tall and dense. Unlike ticks and mosquitoes, chiggers are not known to transmit disease pathogens. If you think you have gotten into chiggers, take a hot bath and launder clothes in hot soapy water.

With social insects like **honey bees** and **wasps**, the sting functions for defense. The key to avoiding bee stings is to make sure the bees don't feel threatened. When working in the yard, don't smell or look like a flower. Bees detect and follow strong scents. Wearing perfumes or bright-colored clothing, especially floral prints, attract nectar-seeking bees and wasps to investigate. Be careful when working in the flower garden, or you might put your hand into something that won't like you.

Sweat bees can be really bothersome if you like to work in the heat of the day. These small black, brown, red or metallic green bees lick salt from sweaty skin. Their attraction to sweat makes them a nuisance, and they sting if squeezed or squashed against your skin. It's best just to brush them away.

Bothersome Pests Continue as Summer Ends

Need a reason not to rake leaves, especially oak leaves? The tiny **oak leaf itch mite** is almost invisible to the naked eye and can produce an itchy rash. Most bites occur when raking infested pin oak leaves. Control of the itch mite isn't easy, since tree sprays do not penetrate

Don't Breathe, It's the Main Attraction

Bees may follow perfumes and seek out the salt in your perspiration, but blood-feeding pests follow the trail of carbon dioxide to find us. You know — CO₂ — what we exhale when we breathe. Mosquitoes and ticks are attracted to increased levels of carbon dioxide to find their prey. Larger people tend to give off more carbon dioxide, which is why mosquitoes typically prefer adults to small children. Movement and body heat also attract mosquitoes. Therefore, you're better off if you slow down, stop to smell the roses and don't sweat the little things.

their leaf galls. Repellents are not known to be very effective. A killing frost seems to end the problem. So if you have oaks, consider postponing your raking chores until a hard frost, wear long sleeves and gloves or just wait until they blow into someone else's yard.

Prevention and Treatment

Wearing light-colored clothing allows you to spot ticks more easily and tucking your pant legs into your socks helps deter both ticks and chiggers. Repellents are useful in preventing mosquito, tick and chigger bites. Apply the repellent to clothing around the ankles, waist and arms. Using an insect repellent that contains DEET (diethyl toluamide) on your skin protects you because it interferes with the pest's ability to locate you. Another repellent called permethrin, which is best used on clothing, actually kills ticks, mosquitoes and chiggers. Always read and follow label instructions.

Since most of these pests like thick vegetation, keeping lawns mowed and trimming border areas will reduce desirable habitat. Applying a pesticide treatment where the lawn meets woody areas can also reduce exposure to ticks and chiggers. Be prepared, and don't let these pests ruin your quality time outside. ♡

Douglas A. Spilker, Ph.D., is a consulting ornamental plant pathologist and entomologist, photographer, garden writer and lecturer, gardening in Blue Springs, Mo. Dr. Doug can be reached at askdrdoug@gmail.com.