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Fascinating Fleas Soon to Jump Around

Adult fleas are 1/8 inches in length, dark brown in color, wingless, have a flattened body and hind legs modified for jumping. Cat fleas are the most common flea found in and around structures in Texas. Although cat fleas prefer cats as hosts, they are capable of surviving on dogs and other wild or domestic animals. So not only will pet owners have fleas, but fleas can be brought closer to structures due to wildlife. Other animals such as roof rats, squirrels, raccoons, and wild dogs and cats commonly live near or in structures and may cause flea infestations. That means no one is immune to this pest insect.

Female fleas will lay eggs after a blood meal. After laying eggs on a host, they fall to the ground in the area where hosts spends most of its time. The eggs hatch and the white, legless larvae emerge. The larvae develop between 9 to 15 days under optimum conditions, but can develop in as many as 200 days. When the larvae are fully developed, they spin cocoons of silk that become covered with soil particles and debris. This makes the cocoon hard to detect in order to protect the pupal stage of the flea. The pupal stage can last from seven days up to one year. If conditions are optimal, then the entire lifecycle of a flea from egg to adult can be completed in 30 to 75 days.

Adult fleas move around freely on the host and can move from host to host. Adults suck blood for survival, egg development, and partially digested blood expelled from the adults as feces will serve as food for larvae. Flea bites are irritating and the constant scratching can result in allergic reactions and other skin problems. Fleas are also capable of transmitting diseases through biting and consuming fleas can result in the transmission of tapeworms.

Some Control Options:

Some Non-Chemical Control Options:

- 1) Wash and change pet bedding regularly.
- 2) Vacuum to remove larvae and eggs. Vacuum under furniture, cushions, beds, and along walls. Discard vacuum cleaner bags at least once a week, since fleas can continue to develop inside vacuum cleaner bags.
- 3) Screen vents in attic and seal bottom of structures, so wildlife can not live inside structures.

Some Chemical Treatments:

1) **Some options for treating pets:** use shampoos and flea combs; insect growth regulators such as the chemicals methoprene or priproxyfen can be used as spot-ons or sprays; other products such as those containing imidacloprid or fipronil can be applied between the shoulder blades of pets; also botanicals can be used such as those containing pyrethrum or d-limonene.

2) **Some options when treating homes:** Several low-toxicity treatments are available for indoor use, such as those containing d-limonene or linalool; insect growth regulators such as methoprene or pyriproxyfen can be used indoors. Methoprene is unstable in sunlight, so it should only be used indoors; however, pyriproxyfen can be applied both indoors and outdoors.

Indoors: treat such areas as where pets sleep and in and under furniture. **Outdoors:** treat such areas as pet bedding, the area under decks and shrubbery, and areas where pets spend most of their time. Two to three follow-up applications of chemicals may be needed to control the flea infestation.

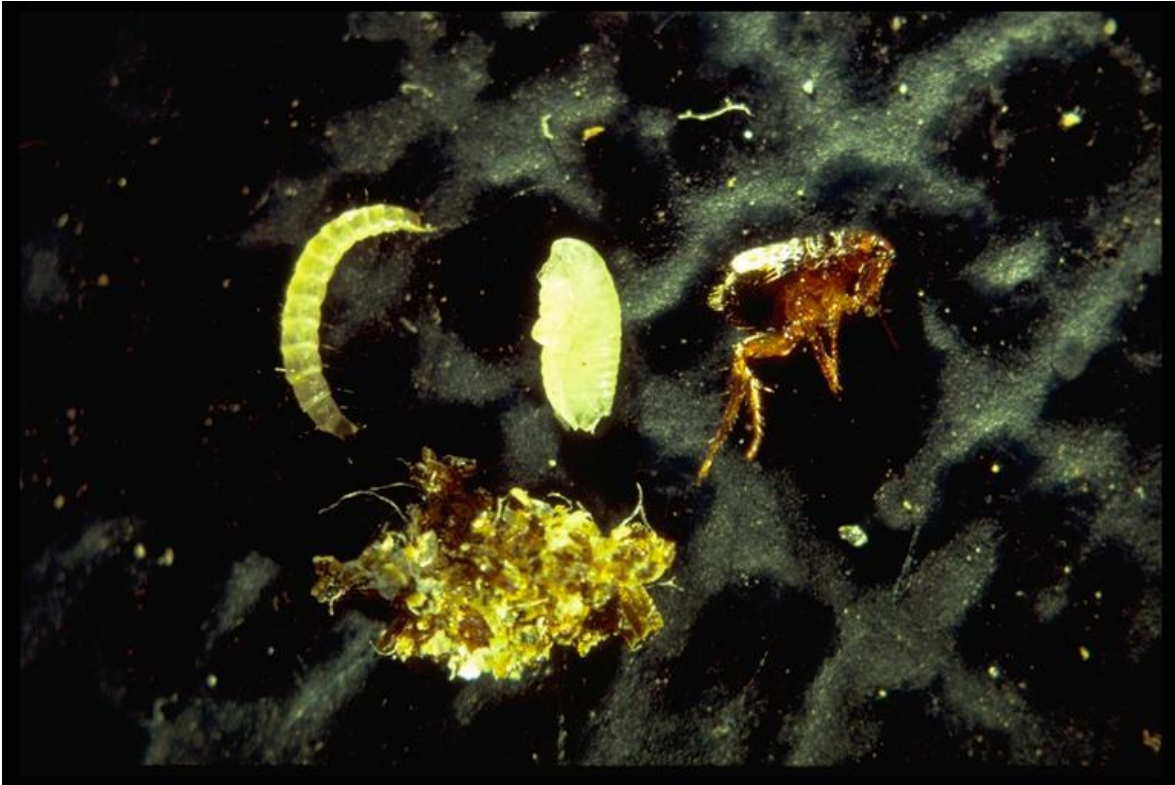


Photo of a cat flea, *Ctenocephalides felis* (Bouche) (Siphonaptera: Pulicidae), larva, pupa, adult and pupal case (bottom). Photo by Bart Drees, Professor and Extension Entomologist, Texas A&M University.

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