



Kimberly Schofield
Program Specialist-Urban IPM
k-engler@tamu.edu

Start Slapping Those Mosquitoes

As we walk into our backyards for a nice relaxing evening, we will be joined by another unwanted pest, the mosquito. Mosquitoes are a diverse group of flies that are found worldwide and new mosquito species are continually being introduced into the United States. Currently, there are 85 species of mosquitoes found in Texas.

Mosquitoes develop through a complete lifecycle with an egg, larva, pupa and adult stage. Mosquito eggs may be laid individually or in clusters on the surface of water or individually in dry locations that will flood periodically. The eggs hatch into larvae that eat microscopic plants, animals and organic debris in the water. The larvae will develop into pupae, which do not feed. The adult stage will emerge from the water to take flight. Adult male and female mosquitoes will feed on nectar, honeydew and fruit juices. Male mosquitoes will have hairy antennae that they use to locate females.

The female mosquito will consume blood in order to develop her eggs. This causes mosquitoes to be considered one of the biggest medical threats to humans, since they are capable of transmitting diseases, such as West Nile Virus, Eastern Equine Encephalitis, and Yellow Fever. Also females inject saliva as they consume the blood meal. This will cause itching after she flies away.

Controlling Mosquito Populations Outdoors:

Some Control Options Outdoors:

The number one way to reduce mosquito populations in your yard is **source reduction**. Mosquitoes need as little as a bottle cap full of water to complete their lifecycle, so all areas where water collects need to be emptied or changed weekly. If standing water is eliminated in your backyard, then the overall mosquito population in your area will be reduced.

- 1) Areas containing water should be changed or emptied, such as wading pools buckets, bird baths, pet dishes, ponds, boat covers, irrigation systems, and French drains.
- 2) Holes or depressions in trees should be filled with sand or mortar.
- 3) Leaky pipes faucets should be repaired.
- 4) Standing water that can not be drained, mosquito dunks containing *Bacillus thuringiensis israelensis (Bti)*, can be used.

Mow tall grass and reduce the amount of foliage to reduce the resting sites for adult mosquitoes.

Insecticides can be applied to trees and shrubs, such as those containing pyrethrin, to kill adult mosquitoes.

Some options to prevent mosquito bites:

- 1) Limit evening activities since mosquitoes are active at night.
- 2) Avoid wearing dark colors, since mosquitoes rely on visual cues to locate hosts.
- 3) Avoid exercising or yard work in the heat of the day, since mosquitoes are attracted to carbon dioxide and perspiration.
- 4) Avoid wearing fruity or floral fragrances in perfumes, hair products, or sunscreens, since these scents are more attractive to mosquitoes.
- 5) Wear long, loose-fitting clothing to avoid mosquito bites.
- 6) Chemicals can be applied to the skin and clothes to prevent bites. One chemical, DEET, has been an effective repellent to mosquitoes for around 50 years. There are also other mosquito repellents are the market such as picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus, oil of eucalyptus, and soybean oil-based repellents.



Asian tiger mosquito, *Aedes albopictus* (Skuse) (Diptera: Culicidae). Photo by Dr. Bart Drees, Professor and Extension Entomologist.

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