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Pest Check

Hungary, Hungary Ticks Appear!

Don't be surprised if you venture outside and find ticks crawling on your body. Ticks are in the class Arachnida, since adult ticks have eight legs. The female ticks occur in large numbers in early summer, in order to feed on blood. After engorging itself on blood, the female will drop off and lay clusters of thousands of eggs in ground litter. The female will die soon after laying eggs and the male tick will die after mating with one or more female ticks. The eggs will hatch into "seed ticks," since they are small in size. The seed ticks will feed on a host and then drop off to molt into the nymphal stage. There will be two or three nymphal stages before molting into an adult, depending upon the species of tick. It can sometimes take up to 3 years for a tick to complete its lifecycle, from egg to adult.

Ticks have piercing-sucking mouthparts that allow them to ingest blood from a host, in order to survive and produce eggs. They feed by making a small cut into the skin with their piercing mouthparts. Then they set the barbed teeth onto the anchoring device and secrete a fluid to cement their mouthparts onto the skin.

Some of the most common ticks in Texas are the Lone Star Tick (*Amblyomma americanum*), the American Dog Tick (*Dermacentor variabilis*), and the Brown Dog Tick (*Rhipicephalus sanguineus*). The Lone Star tick is brown to tan in color, with males being 1/3 inch in length and females being 1/2 inch in length when engorged. The females will have a single silvery-white spot on its back, while the male has scattered spots around the entire margin of its body. The American Dog Tick has pale whitish or yellowish markings on its back, with males being 1/8 inches in length and females being 1/2 inches when engorged. The preferred host is dogs, but it can feed on other animals, including humans. The Brown Dog tick is reddish-brown in color, with males being 1/8 inches in length and females being 1/2 inches when engorged. It prefers dogs and other animals and rarely attaches to humans. It is the most commonly found tick in and around homes, since it feeds on dogs and then drops off.

Ticks can be dangerous animals since they can cause anemia and they have been linked to transmitting disease agents that can cause Rocky Mountain spotted fever, Lyme disease and tularemia. Rocky Mountain spotted fever can cause high fever, muscle aches, chills and a rash that develops a few days later. Lyme disease can cause rashes on the skin and problems to the joint, heart and nervous system. Tularemia can cause such symptoms as enlarged lymph nodes, headaches, fever, muscle aches, and weight loss.

Remember that ticks must be attached for multiple hours before disease-causing bacteria are injected into its host. Always check yourself when you leave a tick-infested area. If you find a tick attached to you or your companion animal, use tweezers to grasp the tick at the surface of the skin and pull straight out. If no tweezers are present, use a tissue to protect your fingers from exposure to the tick's bodily fluids.

Some Ways to Prevent Tick Bites:

- 1) Tuck your pant legs into your socks and apply a repellent to your clothing, such as DEET.
- 2) Mow grass to a short length. Shorter grass is hotter and less humid than tall grass.
- 3) Do not leave pet food outside and fix fences to avoid stray or wild animals from entering yard. This should decrease the number of ticks entering your area from wild animals.
- 4) Ticks can hide in almost any crevice such as in bricks, under the edges of siding and along walkways or paving stones. Granular and liquid insecticides can be used in these areas, such as those containing permethrin or bifenthrin. Read the product label before applying. Ticks are hard to control, so persistent treatments are needed.



Adult female Lone star tick, *Amblyoma americanum* (Linnaeus) (Acari: Ixodidae).
Photo by Dr. John Jackman, Extension Entomologist and Professor at Texas A&M University, College Station, TX.

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