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Tick Problems

Ticks can be extremely difficult to control around residential areas, especially when areas adjoining properties have bushy, native and natural vegetation surrounding it. Ticks need certain environmental conditions to reproduce and survive.

Research has shown ticks are most often found in 'transition areas'. Transition areas are locations that have trees and brush adjacent to open grass areas.

Some tick prevention demonstration work has been done by putting down wood chips as a boundary to limit the movement of ticks into a residential yard. This has shown to be useful because it decreases a favorable environment over which ticks can move by decreasing the humidity in their microhabitat. Wood chipped area can also be spiked with recommended chemicals in order to better target chemical control measures.

Another tactic in the war on ticks is to keep lawn grass mowed closely. A regularly mown lawn allows for temperatures to increase rapidly after sunrise and reduces the build-up of humidity down in the grass canopy. Ticks thrive in locations of high humidity and consistent temperatures.

Landowners whose property borders a pasture, bushy or native area should consider limiting the access of deer into areas that are frequented by people. Pets should be prevented from roaming off into 'transition areas' because they can transport ticks into both the yard and a home.

Wildlife, such as deer, can have well over a thousand female ticks on them that often drop into a yard or residential area. Once located in the landscape, each female tick can lay over 12,000 eggs each following a blood meal. It's not hard to recognize that landowners who limit deer and wildlife from entering their property have significantly less problems with tick infestations.

There are two major ticks that infest residential areas. First, the Lone Star Tick will be the most common and frequently encountered. The female Lone Star Tick has the lone whitish spot on its back that makes it easily identifiable.

Lone Star Ticks are a 'three-host' tick which can be found on humans throughout all stages (instars) of development. It is active from early spring until late fall and has been known to transmit human ehrlichiosis, tularemia, and American Q fever. The other disease/illness this tick is well known for is Southern Associated Rash Illness (STARI) that is often confused with Lyme disease. For more information on tick borne diseases visit the Center for Disease Control website at www.cdc.gov for detailed references.

The second most common tick would be the American Dog Tick, which like the Lone Star Tick is a 'three-host' tick. However, it is mostly the adult American Dog Tick that attacks humans because the immature stages are found mainly on rodents.

The American Dog Tick is the only tick in Oklahoma that vectors Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever. This tick prefers domestic animals like dogs and cats, but when humans share common areas with pets you can expect to find them on you.

American Dog Ticks can be identified by their reddish-brown color with silver-white markings on the upper body regions of the backside just behind the head. It becomes more problematic in landscapes and homes where pets are allowed to roam freely.

Several final thoughts on tick problems would be to wear light colored clothes and a repellent (20% or higher concentration of DEET) when venturing out into a tick infested area. When ticks become a consistent problem consider enacting some control measure along the 'transition area'. And finally, mow yard grass regularly to prevent it from becoming tall and rank.

Should a tick attach to a pet or human, remove the tick at the head area with tweezers and pull it straight out slowly. Do not grab the body of the tick with tweezers and yank or twist a tick out.

Also, never burn a tick out because crushing or burning ticks forces toxic chemicals out of the tick and into the human body prior to removal. Seek immediate medical attention if a rash develops around the tick bite area within 2 to 10 days after the initial bite.

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