

## Natural Ways to Prevent and Treat Bug Bites

by Megan Hirt July 27, 2007

It's hard to resist the lure of the outdoors during these summer months. But whether it's a chore, a meal or a simple frolic that beckons you into the open air, you're likely to be stung, feasted on or just irritated by bugs.

### Prevention

Rather than reaching for manufactured insect repellents that use powerful chemicals to keep bugs at bay, try these tips to naturally prevent bug bites.

**Wear light-colored, loose-fitting clothing** when outside. You'll lower your chances of popping up on a mosquito's radar, as these bugs are attracted to dark colors and easily bite through tight clothing. Also avoid wearing bright or floral patterns, as resembling a scrumptious flower can make you attractive to bees and wasps.



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Don't swat it: You can fend off bugs without chemicals.

Even if you don't have a pool or pond, you still need to **eliminate standing water** around your home, which is an invitation for mosquitoes to lay eggs near your abode. Drill holes in the bottoms of things like trash bins to drain water that may collect in them. Change birdbaths and pets' water dishes at least once a week and as often as possible in the summertime to wipe out any breeding grounds mosquitoes may have created. Check for other standing water sources, such as gutters, flower pots and children's toys.

Rosemary, basil, catnip, [lemon balm](#) and rose geraniums are a few of the **plants you can grow** that have insect-repelling qualities. Lemon balm and catnip are especially good for warding off mosquitoes: Researchers at Iowa State University found the essential oil in catnip to be about 10 times more effective at repelling mosquitoes than DEET, the widely used synthetic repellent. Simply crush the leaves of any of these plants to release their scents and rub them on your exposed skin.

**Make your own catch-all insect repellent** from a concoction of essential oils:

- 2 ½ teaspoons total of any of the following essential oils: *basil, cedarwood, citronella, juniper, lemon, myrrh, pine, rose geranium or rosemary* (available at health food stores)
- 1 cup 190-proof grain alcohol (available at liquor stores)
- Place ingredients in a jar with a tight-fitting lid and shake vigorously. Transfer to a small bottle for storage. To use, rub a small amount on exposed skin, though test first to make sure skin doesn't react negatively.

Don't like measuring and mixing? Buy an herbal insect repellent [here](#).

An irritating mosquito to humans is welcome nourishment to **bats**. See [Beat Mosquitoes with Bats](#) for more on attracting these incredible insect-eaters.

Turns out **garlic** wards off more than vampires. You can make a potent mosquito repellent by mixing one part garlic juice with five parts water in a small spray bottle. Shake and spray a light coating of the mixture on exposed skin.

### Treatment

If you are bitten or stung, try the following natural healing remedies.

**Plantain**, a common weed in yards and parks, can zap out pain, heat and swelling when its leaves are chewed and applied to a bite. Identify plantain by the five parallel veins that run the length of each leaf. Get a closer look [here](#).

Rub **aloe vera** leaves on stings or bites to relieve burning sensations.

Ease itch by applying a few drops of **lavender oil** as needed.

These are just a few of the dozens of safe, natural ways to prevent and soothe bug bites.

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**NOTE from Sustainable Urban Gardens:** Make an insect repellent using lemon, rose geranium, rosemary & lavender EO's in alcohol & cheap vodka—It's cheaper and just as effective. Don't add an extra amount of EO's—it's not good for your skin.