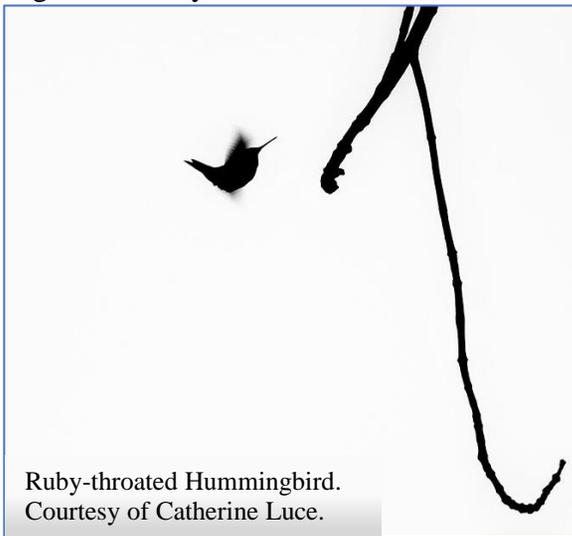


MOSQUITO AND TICK SPRAY

A request from your neighbors:

The “neighbors” in the title above are the bugs and birds that live in your yard. Sprayed poisons affect them directly and perhaps us. Mosquitos and ticks are a health hazard and bothersome but please think twice before hiring a company to spray poison in your yard. What we’d like to do is tell you why you shouldn’t spray, offer alternatives, and, if you must spray, recommend how it is done.

You’re better protected from mosquitos and ticks by routine. For mosquitos, by a deet-free spray to your body. For ticks, sprays applied to clothing and vigilant checking. Checking clothing and all parts of the body (especially armpits and belt areas) after being outdoors **must** be a routine. Spraying gives a false sense of security. Sprays, both yard and body, wear off and not everyplace is treated. A routine of thorough checking is your best defense. Ticks are everywhere at all times of the year Be Vigilant – call your doctor if one is embedded.



Ruby-throated Hummingbird.
Courtesy of Catherine Luce.



Reasons not to spray:

- It kills dragonflies, robber flies, toads, frogs and other insect and amphibian predators of ticks and mosquitos.
- Baby birds eat nothing but insects, caterpillars mostly. The poisons reduce the supply of all insects and get into baby birds through sickened insects.
- The mosquitos and ticks *will* adapt to the sprays. When they come back, all the predator bugs will be dead and the birds have moved elsewhere.
- You will get the poison on you. It may not make you sick, but few chemicals are screened for health effects to people – no matter what the salesman tells you.

Alternatives to spraying:

- Make sure there are no open, stagnant water sources. Clean out gutters and empty any standing water. Mosquitos mostly breed in isolated puddles that have no predators.
- Clean birdbaths frequently. These water sources are important to animals but can become one of those stagnant puddles.
- Use deet-free bug sprays on your clothing and pets. And keep it handy, the safe ones should wash off and need refreshing.
- Wear light colored clothes and check frequently for ticks. Mow the grass in high traffic areas.

If you must spray:

- Make sure the company doing the spraying is licensed and insured, and don’t be shy about telling them where to spray and where not to.
- Get a written copy of the exact name, or better yet, the Safety Data Sheet, of the spray before-hand in case you or your pets have a reaction.
- Check with your neighbors to see if they have any concerns, if they keep honeybees, or have sensitivities.
- The sprayer should work with the breeze (they shouldn’t spray if windy). That is, start at the upwind side and work downwind. Minimize overspray.

How and why you should help your smallest neighbors, Questions & Answers:

Help #1, Make a meadow: Leave, or create, a wild, long-grassed meadow. This can start by simply not mowing an area. Let some of the weeds, many are native wildflowers, come back. Adding meadow plants such as Milkweed, Coneflowers, and Black-eyed Susan will make it look attractive and increase its habitat value. This not only helps the pollinators but also broadens the base of predator insects, especially dragonflies. The number one food of dragonflies is mosquitos.

Ticks can be found in meadows and in your lawn, and you should always be vigilant. Ticks have become a bigger problem due to development pushing deer into residential areas, outdoor house cats exterminated ground-nesting birds like quail that ate ticks. Deer and mice are the primary carriers of ticks. Ticks can be found in your lawn. It may seem that meadows would be a more likely habitat, but meadows also conceal predators such as fox that control mice and tick predators. The main fault of a meadow is that the long grass makes a great launching point for a tick.

Help #2, Shelter and water: Set up bird houses for house wrens and tree swallows. Bat houses, properly installed, can help but bats aren't doing too well these days. Water holes, birdbaths laid on the ground for insects, amphibians are a big help. Yes, the mice may use it too, so keep it away from the house.

Small mammal predators, such as weasels and skunks know that water holes attract mice, so a ground waterer may be a help to reduce mouse populations. Just don't let the waterer become a mosquito puddle.

Brush piles provide homes for opossums and rabbits. Opossums are not aggressive, do not carry rabies, and eat all the ticks they can get their paws on. Brush piles can also bring in skunks, I've had my share of dogs that got sprayed, but they are quite keen on eating mice and really don't want to bother you.

Help #3, Tree and shrub planting: Native trees and shrubs provide food for insects and birds and increase the diversity of insect life. More diversity invites more insect predators. The caterpillars on the leaves are food for baby birds. The fruit produced by the shrubs feed the birds for winter when feeders are snowed in.



Other things to consider:

Non-native invasive plants such as Japanese Knotweed, Bittersweet and Swallowwort should be removed. But make a point to get rid of Japanese Barberry. Not only is it an invasive non-native plant but because of the thorns and dense character of the plant it is ideal for tick-bearing mice to hide in. This plant has been called a tick incubator.

Most importantly... enjoy the show. If you look closely and patiently you will be amazed. A lot more goes on in a meadow than a lawn. In the daytime, close observation shows a diverse array of insects, all of which want no part of you. At night time, fireflies come out of the tall grasses. Firefly larvae feed on snails which don't take well to lawns but enjoy tall grasses and leafy areas.

More information:

The Xerces Society; dedicated to preserving insects and their habitats <https://xerces.org>

Grow Native Massachusetts; work to encourage native plants and natural landscapes www.grownativemass.org

Prairie Moon Nursery; a commercial supplier of native plants www.prairiemoon.com

Massachusetts Audubon at Stony Brook in Norfolk, MA (keep following Shears Street into Norfolk).

Local nurseries now have stocks of plants but be careful to not get a cultivar or non-native type of plant, they offer scant food for your smallest neighbors.

Suggestions and Questions may be directed to: Wrentham Conservation Commission 508-384-5417, Visit the Commission's website and Facebook page.

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