

South Florida HOME

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RESIDENTIAL AND COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE LISTINGS INSIDE

Mosquito control: From candles to hi-tech zappers

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Special to South Florida Home

Recent rains may have helped alleviate the water shortage, but they have also produced a near-perfect environment for the winged terrorists that can make life miserable in summer: mosquitoes. Always a warm-weather problem, this summer the critters seem to be as large as hummingbirds and as thirsty as camels returning from trekking through the desert.



A simple lamp or candle that disperses pest chasers can help fight mosquitoes.

THE ENEMY

Mosquitoes are easy to hate. It is highly unlikely that they will ever be put on an endangered species list. Creatures like frogs and birds that enjoy having them on their dinner menus seem to be generally unable to manage effective population control, at least from a human point of view.

What's a homeowner to do about these pests that can all but ruin outdoor fun? Start by eliminating their nurseries and playgrounds.

Mosquitoes have a four-stage lifecycle. The female eats a blood meal and then lays her eggs on the surface of stagnant water, or on the edge of a container where water may collect. (Yes, apparently mosquitoes can figure out where water is going to collect.)

The eggs hatch into larvae, which happily grow into the pupa stage. At last they become adults, ready to go out into the

world searching for blood, so they can do their duty and propagate the species.

A good first line of defense in the war on mosquitoes is to make the yard less hospitable for them. Get rid of even small amounts of standing water. Empty and change water in bird baths, fountains, gardening containers, and kids wading pools, at least once a week. (Do be sure pets living outdoors have enough to drink, however.) Keep swimming pools chemically balanced and the water circulating.

Fill in or drain depressions that collect rain water.

FOILING THE VAMPIRES

One of the first lines of defense against mosquitoes, of course, is lotions or spray designed to keep the bloodsucking monsters off human skin. Many work by interfering with the homing radar that draws



Trees and shrubbery are favorite hangouts for mosquitoes, so when a homeowner chooses a mister system, it is a good idea to place nozzles in those areas. Photo courtesy of SWAT Mosquito Systems. Left: A device like this one is designed to attract mosquitoes to it so they stay away from you. It relies on emissions of carbon dioxide mixed with heat that mimics products given off by humans and animals. Photo courtesy of MKS Product Research & Development.

mosquitoes to flesh and blood. While these protectants can be effective, it may be at the cost of greasiness and unpleasant odors on skin and clothes.

Candles and lamps that burn

repellants or pesticides provide some relief. They can be purchased at grocery and outlet stores. Before using, read and

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There a variety of new ways to eradicate mosquitos

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follow directions. Keep away from children and pets. Some products can be hazardous to fish and other marine life, so a homeowner with a backyard pond should take appropriate precautions.

BUG TRAPS

Humans and animals emit carbon dioxide and body heat, which attract mosquitoes. Some devices are designed to emit similar products so hungry insects will be fooled into flying to them instead of to nearby people and pets. Mosquitoes fly to the carbon dioxide emitting machine, where they are trapped and killed.

Alvin Banks, founder of MKS (Mosquito Killing Systems) Product Research and Development in Mexico, MO, manufactures a mosquito trap he says is designed to release measured

amounts of carbon dioxide similar to those exhaled by humans, as well as warmth from a heat chamber that imitates the levels given off by human bodies.

"The CO₂ mixes with the body heat signatures," says Banks, adding that he partners with Critter Control to distribute his product nationwide.

The MKS is designed to attract different species. "The closer you are to the unit, the more effective it is," Banks says. "If you place it farther away from you, you are competing with the unit."

The machine can be programmed to automatically emit the carbon dioxide mixed with heat every six to nine minutes during prime hours for mosquito activity. The cost: about \$795.

RESIDENTIAL MISTING SYSTEMS

Misting systems, originally developed in the 1970s for dairy farms, are becoming popular among homeowners.

They are designed to spray fine mists of pesticides through a series of nozzles placed at intervals around the perimeter of a yard, as well as on part of houses and fences. Tubing connects the nozzles to a tank that holds the supply of pesticide. The systems can be set to turn on at regular intervals via a timer, or manually by a remote control or a switch.

Steve Jenkins of SWAT Mosquito Systems in Miramar compares the convenience of misting systems to lawn sprinkler systems. Most residential systems use pesticides that contain pyrethrins or permethrin. "The products labeled for residential misting have minimal toxicity, although some people may be allergic to them," Jenkins says.

Pyrethrins is made from a substance in the chrysanthemum plant, while permethrin is synthetic. The natural prod-

uct tends to break down fairly quickly. "The synthetic stays around until it gets washed away."

Jenkins recommends that nozzles be placed about 10 feet apart around the perimeter of the yard. "Most of the mosquitoes that are attracted to you come from nearby," he says.

Misters can be programmed to go off several times a day, particularly at dusk, when mosquitoes are most active. Misters are available that can be installed by do-it-yourselfers, with the price varying according to the complexity of the system and the size of the yard.

The price of a professionally installed system also varies according to the size of the property. An average system from SWAT costs about \$4,000. "But it's permanent," Jenkins says. "And once you have it, you don't want to live without it."