

# South Florida HOME

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RESIDENTIAL AND COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE LISTINGS INSIDE

## Taking back the yard: fighting mosquitoes during the rainy season

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Special to South Florida Home

Summer may mean trips to the beach and backyard barbecues, but it also means rain and mosquitoes. During the wet season, the voracious winged tormentors seem to reproduce at warp speed, attaining the size of jet fighters and the determination to suck more blood than the characters of the Twilight series.

"This season is the worst I've seen in 10 years," says Steve Jenkins, owner of Swat Mosquitoes Systems in Miramar. "And over the past few years, I've been seeing a lot more of the Asian Tiger species. They bite during the day, not just at dusk and dawn like the Salt Marsh species."

Unfortunately, Asian Tigers also can carry dengue fever, West Nile virus, encephalitis and some other illnesses.

### FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT

While it is difficult to win the war against mosquitoes, there are battle strategies and weapons available. The first thing to do is try to avoid letting them turn the yard into a maternity ward. "Get rid of standing water, because that's where they lay their eggs,"



Candles and lamps that emit repellents into the air as they burn can help in the battle against mosquitoes.

Jenkins says.

Eggs need only about an inch of water to hatch, so be diligent. Keep grass cut, bushes trimmed, and pick up containers and toys that can hold water. Pet dishes that are outdoors should be changed daily. Even some flowers, like bromeliads, and downed palm fronds can collect enough water to become insect nurseries.

Mosquitoes hone in on their prey by detecting carbon dioxide, octenol, which is present in human breath and sweat, and other chemicals, according to the website [mosquitoworld.net](http://mosquitoworld.net). The diabolical creatures can detect human beings from several hundred feet away. And while mosquitoes seem to like the odor of drying sweat, they also enjoy the smells of some shampoos, perfumes and colognes, so it may be a tossup as to whether it is better to smell good or bad.

### MOSQUITO LIFE CYCLE

A female mosquito lays eggs every third day or so, says [mosquitoworld.net](http://mosquitoworld.net). To keep her babies-to-be safe, she floats them on tiny rafts in clumps of 100 to 300 each. When the eggs hatch, larvae called wigglers emerge, and after shedding their skins several times, they develop into comma-shaped pupa, or tumblers. About four days later, the hungry adult mosquitoes emerge.

A male mosquito doesn't bite—he simply starts searching for a mate that he finds by listening for the sound of a female's wing beats the website says. He will live for only about five days after mating, innocently feasting on fruit and plant nectar.

The female, however, is eager

for a blood meal. When a mosquito bites, it uses one tube in its proboscis to inject an anticoagulant into the skin that will keep the victim's blood from clotting, and drinks blood with a second one. "It's the anticoagulant that causes the welts," Jenkins says.

### WEAPONS FOR THE BATTLE

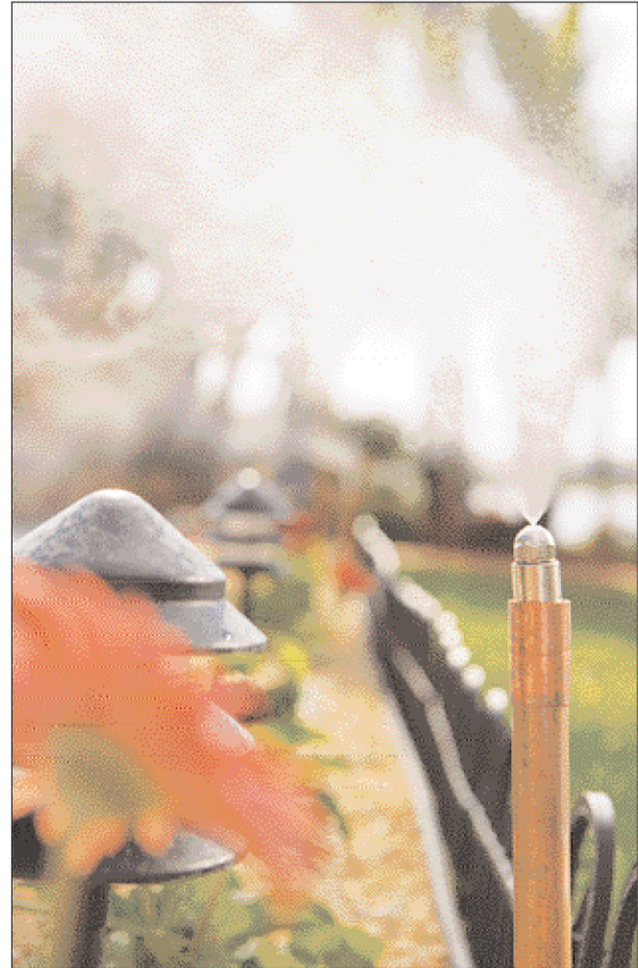
One way to keep away mosquitoes is to apply repellent to the skin. Studies show that the most effective repellents contain DEET, a chemical that works by jamming the sensors of mosquitoes so they become confused and can't land or bite. DEET has been around for about 50 years, and is generally considered safe when used as directed.

For those reluctant to use the often greasy and smelly topical repellents, candles and lamps that emit repellents into the air as they burn can help. They can be purchased at grocery and outlet stores. It is important to read and follow directions, and to keep them away from children and pets, and out of backyard fish ponds.

Chemicals to fog the yard are available at home improvement stores, but they must be reapplied each time they dissipate. Mosquito traps, which attract the insects using light and chemical odors similar to those emitted by humans, are another option.

### MISTING SYSTEMS

For those willing to make the investment, there are misting systems. Developed in the 1970s for dairy farms, they are now being used by homeowners tired of summer itching. Nozzles are installed every 10 feet or so in areas of landscaping where mosquitoes like to live, and also around the perimeter of the yard. "You don't put the nozzles where you want to be—you put them where the mosquitoes live," Jenkins says. "And putting



Misting systems, developed in the 1970s for dairy farms, they are now being used by homeowners tired of summer itching. Photo: Swat Mosquito Systems

them around the perimeter creates a barrier against your neighbor's property. Mosquitoes don't travel very far, and they have to sense you to find you."

Tubing connects the nozzles to a supply tank that holds the pesticide. Most residential systems contain pyrethrin, a biodegradable substance made from dried chrysanthemums, or permethrin, which is synthetic and remains until it is washed away. "Most people want something that's biodegradable," Jenkins says.

The misting system can be programmed to automatically

dispense the chemical, or it can be done manually. It is best to mist two to four times a day for about 30 seconds at a time, Jenkins says. Dusk and dawn are especially important times. The average cost of a professionally installed system is between \$3,500 and \$5,000.

### STAY AHEAD

Regardless of the weapons chosen, it is important to stay ahead of mosquitoes and fight them before they bite. Summer in South Florida is too much fun to waste.