

*Yard and Garden – 06-13-2015 – Ted Griess/ Extension Horticulture Assistant*

For years I've experienced a mild case of tinnitus. For those of you not familiar — tinnitus is a physical condition that many people experience. It can be described as hearing a high-pitched ringing or buzzing in one's head. There are many theories as to its cause.

With all the wonderful rains we've received, you, too, might be hearing a high-pitched buzzing. If so, I have a hunch you are not experiencing tinnitus; but, rather, you are dealing with a condition I've coined 'skeeteritus.' Think about it. The buzzing you are hearing is likely not in your head but near your head, and usually this high-pitched buzzing is followed with a stinging sensation somewhere on your head. With the welcomed rains, an unwelcome pest arrived.

I'm finding it less enjoyable to be outdoors in the yard, especially around dusk, because of buzzing and biting mosquitoes. Numerous species of mosquitoes exist in North America. All prefer aquatic habitats and with our beautiful rains, the population of mosquitoes has increased dramatically.



It's a fact. Mosquitoes carry diseases. They've been known to change the course of history. For example, thousands of workers died from the mosquito-borne diseases called malaria and yellow fever when the Panama Canal was built. Today, both West Nile virus and encephalitis are viral diseases carried by mosquitoes. Most people worry to some degree

about these diseases; while at the same time people also worry about the potential ill effects of using mosquito repellents.

For years, we've been told to use repellents containing the chemical Deet (diethyltoluamide) — a product introduced in the 1950's. This product is used in many brand-name repellent formulations such as lotions, gels, aerosols, and creams. Research has shown that products using Deet in concentrations less than 15% have little effect on repelling mosquitos. Repellent formulations containing 30% are very effective at repelling, but formulations greater than 30% should be avoided. Higher, Deet

concentrations have been known to cause skin rashes and even disorientation and seizures. Deet should never be used on babies younger than two months and sparingly on young children.

I recently read an article “How to Win the Battle of the Bugs” in the July, 2015, issue of *Consumer Reports*. It claims to have tested new repellents made with milder, plantlike materials that are safer and just as effective. In these repellents, the active ingredients are picaridin and/or oil of lemon eucalyptus — both occur naturally but are chemically produced. One such product called *Sawyer Fisherman’s Formula* containing picaridin received the best all-around rating. Keep in mind, when using any repellents, follow the recommended directions on the label.

Other than using repellents — I’ve listed a few things one can do to minimize being bitten by this high-pitched, buzzing menace.

- First, eliminate all mosquito breeding areas on your property. Examine and drain leaf-clogged gutters, rain pools, bird baths, old tires, cans, bottles and children’s wading pools. Since mosquitoes need standing water to complete their life cycles, eliminating this requirement is the first step in their control.
- While working outdoors, wear light-colored clothing. Limit outdoor activity to when temperatures are cooler and there is brisk air movement. Avoid working in the yard at dawn and dusk— times when mosquitoes are most active.
- If a backyard barbeque is in your plans, you may want to treat flower borders, smaller trees and shrubs around the patio with either Malathion or Sevin about three hours before your outdoor event. Avoid either if pollinators are in the area.

Like me, you also might be afflicted with tinnitus, but of late, I’m guessing that high-pitched buzzing you’re hearing in your head is more than likely ‘skeeteritus.’ In this case, their buzzing can’t hurt, but their bite might. Fight back.