

## Spritz Your Pet With This Kitchen Staple Today to Avoid Fleas

No one I know likes fleas. But that doesn't mean you need to douse your pet - and by extension, yourself and your children - with chemicals. Just grab this from your kitchen cabinet, mix with water and spritz it on your pet before heading outside. Fleas hate the smell and taste.

**Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker**

### STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Apple cider vinegar can be used as a natural flea repellent
- While it doesn't kill fleas, it may repel them because fleas dislike its smell and taste
- Make a solution out of equal parts apple cider vinegar and water; add the mixture to a spray bottle and spritz it on your pet before he heads outdoors
- To "supercharge" this spray and make it even more distasteful to fleas, add in a few drops of essential oil such as geranium, lemongrass, lavender, neem or catnip oil

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The potential for a flea infestation on your pet, and therefore in your home, is one of the unpleasant parts of pet ownership. Fortunately, it's not a given that your pet will ever get fleas, and there are many steps you can take to lower the risk.

Many pet owners turn to chemical flea products, including spot-on treatments, collars, powders and more, often believing them to be the only option. However, the pesticides used in these products can pose dangers to your pets and other members of your household, like pregnant women or children snuggling up to your pet.

The fact is, applying too much topical flea product to your pet, or mixing up a dog flea preventive and using it on a cat, can be deadly.

Even when applied properly, there's no guarantee of safety and serious side effects, from skin irritation to neurological problems, gastrointestinal disorders and organ failure, are all-too-commonly reported.<sup>1</sup>

### Apple Cider Vinegar: Natural Flea Prevention

It makes sense to try a non-toxic flea deterrent whenever possible. Apple cider vinegar is one such option. While it doesn't kill fleas, per se, it may repel them because fleas dislike its smell and taste.

One of the simplest ways to use this natural flea repellent is to make a solution out of equal parts apple cider vinegar and water. I recommend using raw, organic apple cider vinegar.

Add the mixture to a spray bottle and spritz it on your pet before he heads outdoors. You can also spray his bedding. To “supercharge” this spray and make it even more distasteful to fleas, add in a few drops of dog-safe essential oils.

Geranium, lemongrass, lavender, neem and catnip oil are good choices for essential oils that will help deter fleas (as well as ticks, mosquitos and other pests) from your pet. Apple cider vinegar can also be used in other ways to repel fleas, including:

- **Add it to your pet's food** — Use about 1 teaspoon apple cider vinegar per every 20 pounds of dog. I don't recommend adding vinegar to your pet's water because many dogs dislike the taste and consume less than adequate amounts of water.
- **At bath time** — You can pour diluted apple cider vinegar over your pet during bath time as a flea-preventive treatment. I use 1 cup of vinegar to 1 gallon of water.

Pour over a freshly bathed dog (avoid his head), massage into his coat and towel dry, do not rinse. You can also simply add about two cups of apple cider vinegar to his bath water.

Bathing your dog regularly is also important because fleas are less attracted to clean animals (using a natural peppermint or neem pet shampoo will give you even more anti-flea protection).

## What Else Works to Keep Fleas Away Naturally?

If you loathe the smell of vinegar, try citrus juice instead. Fleas dislike citrus, so sprinkle some fresh-squeezed lemon, orange or grapefruit juice on your pet's fur, being careful to avoid her eyes (be aware, however, that lemon juice can lighten dark fur).

You can also add 1 cup of lemon juice to 1 gallon of rinse water and pour over a freshly bathed dog (avoid head), massage into coat and towel dry.

Finish off bath day with a light dusting of food-grade diatomaceous earth down your dog's back, which provides extra protection during the worst weeks of flea and tick season.

At the foundational level, you'll want to feed your pet a balanced, species-appropriate fresh-food diet, as this will help keep her immune system functioning optimally. What does this have to do with flea prevention?

Fleas are attracted to unhealthy pets, so keeping yours healthy will make him less of a target. Make sure you're not giving tap water to your pets as well; fluoride and chlorine are chemicals that can negatively affect your pet's immune health.

Avoiding exposure to immune-system stressors like environmental chemicals (including pesticides and lawn chemicals), medications, vaccinations and electromagnetic fields (EMFs) is also important to keep your pet's immune system strong.

The other important element is to make your home environment less hospitable to fleas. Indoors, this entails vacuuming often (floors and furniture) and washing pet bedding, throw rugs and bed linens frequently. If you suspect fleas are present, be sure to empty your vacuum canister immediately after vacuuming.

Outdoors, you'll want to keep your yard tidy by mowing your lawn and removing tall grass and weeds from areas where your pet frequents. Do not stack wood against your house, and clear perennial plants and brush from your gardens when the growing season ends.

## Fleas Are More Than Just a Nuisance

A few fleas can quickly multiply into an infestation on your pet and in your home. One female flea can lay up to 50 eggs a day, which can fall off your pet around your home. The eggs develop into larvae, which then form cocoons.

The flea hatches when it senses heat, vibrations or exhaled carbon dioxide, signaling that an animal is nearby. They then jump onto the host and the cycle continues.<sup>2</sup>

Fleas, which are related to ants and beetles, feed on blood and their bites can lead to irritation and skin allergies. Flea allergy dermatitis (FAD), which is sensitivity (allergy) to flea saliva, is a very common condition in dogs. It's not the bite of the flea that causes most of the itching in dogs with FAD; it's the saliva.

Fleas can also transmit tapeworms, cause cat scratch disease and may even cause severe cases of anemia, especially in young animals. So, needless to say, it's important to keep your pets, and your home, flea-free.

## If You Spot Fleas on Your Pet, Don't Panic

It's relatively simple to remove a few fleas from your pet, and you don't need chemicals to do so. Fleas do not hold on to your pet's fur, so a dip in warm tub of water will cause many of them to fall off into the water.

As mentioned, you can add about two cups of apple cider vinegar to the water to help make your pet less attractive to any other fleas around your home. After the bath, use a flea comb to remove any remaining fleas.

Place your pet on a light-colored towel to catch any fleas that fall off and dip the comb into a bowl of soapy water after each swipe. You can also apply a light dusting of food-grade diatomaceous earth (DE) on your carpets, bare floors, and pet bedding to kill fleas in your pet's immediate environment.

You will want to repeat the bath and flea combing routine until you're sure all fleas have been removed from your pet. This may take several days. In the meantime, be vigilant about vacuuming pet areas and washing pet bedding. You should also do a thorough vacuuming of your entire home and wash bed linens and throw rugs.

The biggest reason homes become infested with fleas is that the owners didn't recognize there was a problem until their home was infested. Completing nightly flea checks (combined with a relaxing massage for your pet) is a great way to bond with your companion, and check for any fleas that may have latched onto your fuzzy one, long before your pet and home are overwhelmed with these little pests.

## Sources and References

[PetMD](#)

<sup>1</sup> [Natural Resources Defense Council, Nontoxic Ways to Protect Your Pet](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Veterinary Pet Insurance](#)