

## Summertime Bug Bites

**Barb Ogg**  
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The extension office has recently had a rash of phone calls about bug bites. Summertime brings people into more contact with outdoor insects that bite and sting. This article will give tips to help determine what could be the source of the bite.

**Before you treat, be sure you know what the pest is.** This is the first rule of managing pests. A woman hired a pest control company to treat her house and yard for fleas. After the treatment, she called the extension office because she was concerned about the insecticides used inside their home.

After asking several questions, I was fairly sure this family didn't have fleas at all, but were getting bitten by chiggers when doing yard work. Clues which helped me decide the bites were from chiggers were:

- She and her husband were both getting bitten, but never saw anything. Fleas are small, but can be seen, especially when they are biting.
- Second, the location of the bite suggested these were chigger bites. Both were getting bites on ankles, under socks and underwear elastic.
- Third, the bites showed up in the morning so they thought they were getting bitten in bed. The fact is chigger bites don't usually appear until a day after the actual exposure. This couple spent \$200

to treat fleas, and treated both indoors and outdoors. The indoor treatment was a waste of money and unnecessarily exposed the inhabitants to chemicals. I question whether the outdoor flea treatment had much effect on chiggers.

### Chiggers

A chigger is the larval stage of a velvety red mite (*Trombicula alfreddugesi*) that lives in the soil. It is so tiny humans can't see it with the unaided eye. The chigger stage is the only parasitic stage of this mite; it attacks rodents, birds, poultry, rabbits, livestock, snakes, toads, as well as humans. The chigger crawls onto feet or legs and moves about until it reaches a place where it is confined, particularly around ankles, under socks, behind knees, under the belt-line and elastic bands of underwear. More infrequently, chiggers move to the upper torso and attack the armpits. Chiggers become active from June through the end of summer.

Chiggers do not burrow under the skin. Instead they crawl into a hair follicle and pierce the skin. During its feeding activities, the chigger injects anti-clotting substances, which results in a bite, which is often painfully itchy and lasts for a week or two, or longer. Insect repellents may prevent bites.

### Fleas

Fleas are more active in warmer months. They are almost always associated with pet or wild animals and can

be "dropped off" by animals wandering through the yard. Fleas prefer pets or wild animals, but will also jump and feed on people.

Flea bites are painful and, even though they are small (pinhead size), fleas are visible so the person getting bitten should be able to see the flea biting him. The most common place for flea bites is on the legs and ankles, which are usually closer to the carpet or soil, but they will feed on any convenient location.

Many years ago, a mother brought her baby into the extension office to have an insect identified she found in her baby's hair. The insect was a cat flea. The baby normally slept on a blanket placed on a carpeted floor. With the exception of the baby's diaper area, her body was completely covered with flea bites. This family did not have a pet.

### Mosquitoes

Mosquitoes are associated with outdoor activities in the summertime. Abundant rainfall brings more mosquitoes. Mosquito repellents do a good job of preventing mosquito bites. Repellents should be used; however, some people, especially small children, may be sensitive to repellents. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends two "conventional" repellents (DEET; picaridin) and two "biopesticide" repellents (oil of lemon eucalyptus; IR3535). For more information about active ingredients in these repellents go to <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/repellentupdates.htm>. Follow label directions before using any repellent.

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### Bed Bugs

Some recent phone calls have been from people who have gotten bitten and worried the bites could be from bed bugs. Dr. Annette Bredthauer, Health and Human Services System conducted a survey of pest control companies. In the last five years, in Nebraska, there has been a 12-fold increase in number of bed bug treatments. These infestations disproportionately impact people who live in high-density housing, apartments, hotels and motels. Only about 20 percent of last year's treatments were in single-family homes.

Bed bugs hide during the day in cracks and crevices near the bed and feed at night. Bites are found on the arms, shoulders, torso and legs. Bites are not often on the face. Because people have variable reactions to bed bug bites, it is difficult, if not impossible, to identify bed bugs from bites alone. Bed bug adults are 1/4-inch long, but immatures are smaller. Small infestations may be hard to find. Eventually, bed bug populations will increase and will be easier to find.

University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension in Lancaster County entomologists identify pest problems at no cost to the public. Bring samples to the office at 444 Cherrycreek Road, Suite A, from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., weekdays.



Chigger — highly magnified above. Not visible to human eye.

Hansell F. Cross, Georgia State University, www.insectimages.org



Cat flea (male adult) — highly magnified above. Approximate size =

Jim Kalisch, UNL Department of Entomology



Mosquito — highly magnified above. Approximate size =

Jim Kalisch, UNL Department of Entomology



Bedbug (adult) — highly magnified above. Approximate size =

Photos by Yvicki Jelliecko, UNL Extension in Lancaster County

## Taking Insect Photos at Spring Creek Prairie

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On Saturday, June 27, Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center was the location for the second annual Insect Photography Workshop presented by University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension. This is an excellent facility for an educational program and the prairie served as a great location to practice what we had learned. The weather cooperated too — it was cloudy, but bright, just perfect for taking photos.

Jim Kalisch, who is a masterful photographer, presented information useful

for beginners and more advanced photographers and served as resource during the six hours we spent there.

Spring Creek Prairie, three miles south of Denton, is an 808-acre tallgrass prairie. Visitors can enjoy miles of walking trails, nearly 650 acres of native (never plowed) tallgrass prairie, ponds and wetlands, wildflowers and grasses, a diverse assortment of birds and other wildlife, historic 19th century wagon ruts, peaceful surroundings and beautiful scenic vistas. Volunteer opportunities are available and education programs for all ages are offered year-round.

Spring Creek Prairie

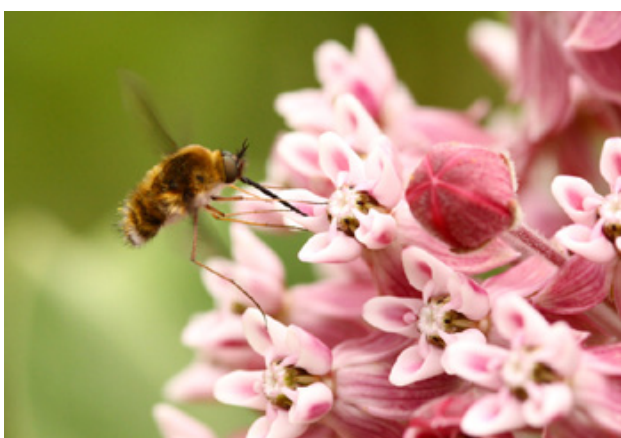
is open seven days a week, Monday-Friday, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday 1-5 p.m., except major holidays. A small fee is charged to defray operating costs, but Tuesdays are free. I was also told if you come before they open, you don't have to pay. It is okay to wander the prairie, even if the education center is closed. This also means there is no shelter and no rest rooms. They charge \$50 to rent the education room for five hours. For more information, go to [www.springcreekprairie.org](http://www.springcreekprairie.org) or call 797-2301.

To see more photos from the Insect Workshop, go to <http://lancaster.unl.edu/pest>.



Jim Kalisch (right) and Francisco Arroyo.

After the educational part of the workshop, attendees took photos of insects at the prairie. Photo by John LeSage.



Bee fly (family *Bombyliidae*) on a flowering milkweed. Photo by Jeremy Lewis.



Resting 12-spotted skimmer dragonfly (family *Libellulidae*). Photo Lorvey Stark.



Immature assassin bug (family *Reduviidae*). Photo by Sek Yee.