



Considerations for Natural vs Chemical Pest Control in Your Pet

For some pets, natural pest control measures are the perfect fit for both pet and owner, and for others it can be questionable, and chemical pesticides are their best option or should be used in combination with natural pest management techniques and supplements. Below are considerations to help caretakers make a more educated choice.

Firstly, each patients' own body chemistry and health effect their ability to fight off both disease and overcome pest exposures, so the more debilitated the patient the less effective some of the natural pest remedies are. Generally, the sicker or older the animal is, the more prone they are to pests and their diseases. In some cases, you have the healthiest animal, but the sheer abundance of the pests will overwhelm them regardless of how healthy they are like taking a walk through tick infested woods. Holistic veterinarians consider alternative pest control over chemical pesticides for many different reasons from having a young healthy animal with reduced exposure to debilitated/immunocompromised patient because although these are the animals that will attract more pests they can be more chemically sensitive and may react to these products. You may notice reactions manifest as extreme pruritis at the site of application if topical or hair loss in the vicinity, GI upset after oral administration, and a small number may even seizure. These are the acute and obvious reactions.

Holistic minded clients often question using chemicals on their pets, as they have concerns for the chronic buildup of these products. It's recommended to not eat pesticide laden foods for people, so why would I not make careful considerations for applying pesticides to my pet? This leaves a lot for the gray area, as we also compare the data we know and do not know about these chemicals and the exposure to the pests and the diseases they protect against. In addition, **varying degrees of toxicosis/allergic reaction**, we should look at what risks the caretaker is willing to take on: the risks of infection vs the risk of however small they maybe. Also, to clarify when a holistic minded person speaks of toxicosis they speak of all levels from slow build up toxicosis to acute which is usually seen as GI upset/pruritis/seizing. Either modality of pest management (chemical or natural) is 100% predictable or risk free, nor are they interchangeable. Let's look at the negatives of each type of pest management to allow you to make your decision on what is the best management for your pet.

Chemical based Pesticides: The safety data studied on pesticides for pets only speaks of acute toxicity, and does not cover other effects that have been studied on pesticides and herbicides used in our food system such as hormone interruption, developmental delays, cell mutations, and cancers. Is it possible that these pet pesticides may cause similar problems? Should we also consider the cumulative effective of pesticides in our food and on our pets the way we do for ourselves. Much research has gone to show that animals have higher chemical exposure rates of all chemicals and pollutants than we do. Their habits of bathing themselves clean increases their toxic exposure from pollution adhering to their coats. Walking through our chemically treated world without foot coverings exposes them to more chemicals such as lawn treatments and third hand smoke (the smoke that falls to the ground) and other pollutants. Finally, as mentioned earlier, we have also seen reactions in pets when they are applied, from severe pruritus to seizures as mentioned above-however rare they maybe there is a risk. These are just a few topics touched on, a deeper look and you will find many articles on the benefits of detoxifying oneself. I see it in my patients daily. So, I suspect the bigger concern is not the individual application of the pet products but the sum of these products with our current environment.



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Natural based pest deterrents/pesticides: These can be a combination or standalone products of essential oils, oils, herbs, diatomaceous earth. While these products are safe for most excluding some essential oils in cats (they can cause seizures) and higher amounts of garlic in dogs and cats (they can cause anemia/hematuria); their effectiveness can be limited as most only repel pests (essential oils) not kill them. And the others, such as herbs are affected by how they are processed. So that bottle of garlic you buy for your pet, might not have any active ingredients to help with intestinal parasites and if it is active, it may do nothing for bloodborne parasites like heartworm or intracellular parasites. So, when using these products, you must do the proper research to use them well and effectively and accept the risks of only deterring the pests. You must make lifestyle changes avoiding dawn and dusk when mosquitos are out, consider reducing outings where ticks are more prevalent (I say more as they still can easily be in your backyard). Not feeding stray cats which can harbor fleas and other pests bringing them up to your home area to name a few considerations. There are many articles on natural pest control, but these are just a few considerations.

Diseases transmitted by pests: Diseases from mosquitoes; tick borne disease like lyme's disease; tapeworms from fleas, and various other intestinal parasites can all be prevented by pesticides. These diseases range in their severity of illnesses from a mild flea bite sensitivity to severe. Lyme's disease can cause a myriad of issues from fever, anemia, to joint pain. Intestinal parasites, to name a few issues-can cause weightless, poor hair coat and diarrhea. Finally, Heartworm disease can cause heart failure/pulmonary embolism. The area you live in, exposure to the pests, weather changes, and pet health all play a factor in how at risk your pet is to contract these diseases. Their health also plays a part in how they react to them, not all pets who are exposed to these diseases succumb to them. The healthier the animal the more natural resistance they can have to overcome. A recent study done to check whether repellants alone vs chemical pesticide (oral or topical), showed in the group where heartworm laden mosquitos were exposed to pets not given chemical heartworm prevention, only half contracted heartworm. That confirms to me they have the ability to manage infectious exposures.

In the end I feel this is a very personal decision as both sides have valuable points and concerns, and neither are without their risks-both seen and unseen.

So again, how do I know which pets should receive pesticides? We go by the owner and pet's health condition and lifestyle. If any one or all of the following apply:

You may be a candidate to use natural pest control alone or in conjunction with a pesticide used sparingly.

- you or your pet eat organic or avoid preservatives, lawn applications, etc where possible
- you believe excessive chemicals are a concern
- you feel your pet has demonstrated chemical sensitives or concerns with detoxification
- your risks for these pests are lower
- you are of the lifestyle where applying daily or frequent remedies like the topical essential oil/oil mixtures to your pet for prevention is not a problem and you accept the risks of possible exposure



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- you go out of your way to avoid high parasite exposures (ie wooded areas or high mosquito times like dawn and dusk)
- Your pet has cancer and are more concerned with overall toxic load
- Would consider checking for heartworm disease with biannual testing to catch any exposure earlier

You may not be a candidate to use natural pest control if:

- have higher exposures to pests (ie have outdoor cats which often have fleas, have a hunting dog, live or travel in an area where fleas and ticks are prevalent),
- do not feel your pet has ever had a reaction to these products or any chemical
- you or your pet has been exposed to Lyme's or above mentioned disease
- you do not limit chemical use on yourself
- you enjoy the convenience of monthly or every 3 month applications of product and find it difficult to due regular flea and tick checks on your pet (although I still recommend you do these regardless)

We have options for both modalities above, just ask your primary veterinarians. For those that do decide to use holistic alternatives for pest control, I encourage you to check your options like Vetri Science Vetri Repel for flea tick and mosquito repellent sold, Dr. Peter Dobias website at peterdobias.com for more flea and tick products my clients have shared with me. We have selected other handouts from various holistic veterinarians that can help educate you on parasites and enhance your pet's ability to ward them off. They cover a range of options from how to use natural products, to how to use traditional pesticides alternatively (off label use). Contact the companies directly for a list of possible outcomes of alternatively recommended alternative uses to make sure you are comfortable with these recommendations.