



URI COLLEGE OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND LIFE SCIENCES (CELS) OUTREACH CENTER

3 East Alumni Avenue
Kingston, Rhode Island 02881

For more information:

Call:

In RI: URI MGA Hotline
1-800-448-1011
Mon.-Thurs. 9:00 a.m.—2:00 p.m.

In MA and CT: 401-874-2900

Outside New England please contact Cooperative Extension in your county.

Websites:

URI Master Gardener Association
www.urimga.org

CELS Outreach Center
www.uri.edu/cels/ceo

DEER TICK

The deer tick (*Ixodes scapularis*) is found in the woods. On lawns, most deer ticks have been recovered within 9 feet of the lawn edge, and especially in areas adjacent to woods, stonewalls, and ornamental plantings and at the the margin where fields meet wooded areas. Ticks can also be found in ground covers. The deer tick transmits a bacterium that causes Lyme disease, a serious human disease that is initially flu-like but if not treated can develop into rheumatoid arthritis-type conditions. Lyme disease is not usually fatal but can be debilitating and difficult to treat if not detected early.

Description and Life Cycle

Adult deer ticks are tiny--approximately the size of a sesame seed. Males are black; females have a brick-red abdomen and a black shield near the head. Females swell when fully engorged after feeding. Adults are found primarily from September through November, and again in March and April. Adults feed mainly on deer, but will also attack cattle, horses, dogs, etc. Humans are accidental hosts.

After hatching from an egg in late spring, deer ticks go through three life stages: larva, nymph, and adult. Each stage requires a different host animal. During each stage a tick feeds only once. Deer ticks need 2 years to complete their life cycle. The larvae feed in late summer on mice, shrews, chipmunks, voles, and other small animals. Newly hatched deer ticks do not initially carry Lyme disease; they pick it up from an infected animal. The white-footed mouse is the primary carrier/source of the Lyme disease bacterium. A tick that picks up the bacterium from feeding will pass it to the next life stage and is able to infect future host animals. Nymphs feed from May through August on larger animals including birds, raccoons, opossum, squirrels, cats, dogs and human beings.

Lyme Disease

If you find a tick on your body, remove it AS SOON AS POSSIBLE; ticks must be attached for 24 hours for the bacteria to be transmitted. To remove feeding ticks, use tweezers ONLY; DO NOT use nail polish, Vaseline, matches or other methods that may traumatize the tick and cause it to regurgitate its gut contents. Grasp the tick with tweezers around its head, close to the skin and pull it up slowly and firmly. Disinfect the bite afterwards with antiseptic.

The risk of being bitten by a deer tick infected with Lyme disease is greatest in



Female Deer Tick



Male Deer Tick

PESTICIDES ARE POISONOUS!! Read and follow all safety precautions on labels. Handle carefully and store in original containers out of reach of children, pets, or livestock. Dispose of empty containers immediately, in a safe manner and place. Pesticides should never be stored with foods or in areas where people eat.

When trade names are used for identification, no product endorsement is implied, nor is discrimination intended against similar materials. Be sure that the pesticide that you wish to use is registered in the state of use.

The user of this information assumes all risk for personal injury or property damage.

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Rhode Island Cooperative Extension provides equal program and employment opportunities. U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating.

Note: The Hotline is open Monday—Thursday, 9:00 a.m.—2:00 p.m. from March 1 to November 1.



the summer months of June and July when the nymph stage is active. This is the time of year when people (and notably children) are most active outdoors. Make a habit of thoroughly checking yourself and others for the tiny nymph following outdoor activities. The risk is also high in the fall, when adults are active. (Adults are easier to see and remove than nymphs.)

The symptoms of Lyme disease are: headache, flu-like symptoms, spreading "bull's-eye" rash from the tick bite, swelling and pain in the joints. Lyme disease symptoms mimic many other diseases. About 80 percent of Lyme disease victims develop a rash within two days to four weeks. If untreated, more severe symptoms may develop – sometimes months to years later. If you suspect that you have contracted Lyme disease, consult a physician immediately.

Tick Avoidance and Management

Avoid ticks outdoors by avoiding walking through tall grass and shrubby areas. Wear slacks tucked into socks and light colored clothing to make it easier to detect ticks. Stay close to the center of hiking trails to avoid brushing against vegetation. Check companions and children frequently for ticks. Apply repellents such as Permethrin to shoes, socks, and pants...and gardening gloves.

Create a tick safe zone by altering the landscape to increase sunlight, reduce tick habitat, and discourage rodent hosts. Keep grass mowed along edges of lawns, driveways, and stonewalls. Avoid ground covers in areas used for family activities. Wildflower meadows and herb gardens are acceptable alternatives for grass in some areas. Use hardscaping, gravel, patios, decking, stones, and mulch around homes. Deer fencing is effective for excluding deer from large areas. Discourage deer from browsing around the property by planting plants that are less palatable to deer. Consult the Deer Management Fact Sheet for more detailed information.

Adapted from Dewey M. Caron, University of Delaware Cooperative Extension, 1999; Kirby C Stafford III, The Connecticut Agricultural Experimental Station, 2005.