



Green Pet Care
- Environmentally Safer Pest Control for Our Furry Companions
Dr. Chandra Degia, PhD



Leaps, barks, spins and wagging doggy tails greeted me when I arrived home from overseas trip - and so did a band of ticks. I had never seen that many ticks on my dogs! April and climate change had brought warmer temperatures as well as a spike in the number of ticks. I spent the next two hours removing and treating for ticks.

Traditionally, powders, sprays, shampoos and washes are used to prevent and remove ticks, fleas and other disease causing organisms from our furry friends. Although these pesticides can kill these pests that make our pets ill, if not applied safely, they can be hazardous to human health as well as the health of other organisms, including helpful insects, birds and other animals. They can get into food, groundwater, rivers and the air.

People can become ill or die because of unsafe use or improper storage of pesticides at home. Even low level exposure in some cases may cause birth defects, behavioural disorders, genetic mutations, and lowered immune system function.

So are there any "green" options that can help reduce pesticide use? Here are a few:

- To kill fleas, lather up Rover in mild soap and water and leave on for a few minutes then thoroughly rinse. This gives quick relief but won't prevent new fleas jumping on board later.
- Use a flea comb, dipped in soapy water to remove fleas and their droppings.
- Removing dead leaves from under trees and shrubs can significantly reduce tick populations in your yard.
- Diatomaceous earth, containing tiny sea creatures called diatoms, can be bought from plant and garden stores, can be sprinkled in places that Lassie frequents and will dry out and kill ticks and fleas. Be careful handling it if you have respiratory problems.
- Wash your pet's bedding weekly and sprinkle the area with baking soda. Sweep or vacuum the baking soda after half an hour.
- Drown fleas by hosing down damp, shady areas in the yard until puddles form.
- Sweep or vacuum your house regularly.

Before trying any pest control strategy please talk to your vet about your animal's health and its level of pest infestation and consider eco-friendly options as often as possible.

Chandra "Dr Chan" Degia, PhD, is a lecturer in the Environmental Management Unit at the University of the West Indies - Mona, and a popular talk show host on Caribridims Radio.