

OREGON STATE AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE AND EXPERIMENT STATION

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COMBATING FLEAS

by

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OREGON STATE AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE
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This very common and annoying pest of the house, outbuildings and dooryards is a small brown insect with flattened sides and a very hard body covering. In addition to the body being flattened, the side of the head is sometimes fitted with two rows of spines with about nine spines in each row. These spines point backward and in such a way as to push the insect forward with every movement. The legs are fitted for walking and jumping and the adults work their way between the hairs of the body with great rapidity.

The dog and cat flea is probably the one most commonly found in the houses. As the name would indicate our household pets frequently harbor this pest. The general infestations of fleas on the farm, however, are sometimes caused by the human flea, Pulex irritans, which is associated with certain domestic animals, especially hogs. Occasionally the western hen flea, Ceratophyllus niger Fox is responsible for the invasion. The most commonly serious breeding ground and point of infestation appears to be the pig pens or hog houses. The larvae live and develop in the dust and filth in the cracks of the floors, and in rubbish and dirt in and about outbuildings.

Control Measures

To rid an infested premises of fleas is no easy matter. Persistence is one essential and a combination of several suggested remedies is usually required.

1. House pets and infested farm animals should receive frequent applications of a dust or liquid insecticide for the purpose of killing the fleas on them. The insecticides usually recommended are either one of the coal-tar creosote preparations known as "stock dips", fresh pyrethrum powder, or powdered roots of a tropical plant known as derris. When used for cats, the preparation should be weaker than for dogs as the skin of cats is more easily injured with chemicals than is that of dogs. On hogs the fleas may be destroyed by dipping or spraying the animals with a "Stock dip" or by sprinkling crude petroleum on them. The application of crude petroleum should be rather light especially if the hogs are not protected from the cold or from the hot sun.

2. Clean up all waste straw, weeds, long grass and other debris under infested sheds, hog pens, barns, outbuildings, barn lots and dooryards. This waste material should be hauled out and scattered far from the house and plowed under or burned.

3. The application of creosote oil with a spray pump to all the infested areas is said to be of value in killing both adult and immature fleas. Special attention should be given to the surface of the soil in comparatively dry places in sheds and barns. It is often necessary to repeat the application three or four times during the summer.

4. A salt solution is also of value in killing immature fleas. The general method of making the application of the salt solution is to scatter the salt around on the ground and then wet it down. Care should be exercised not to allow animals to have access to the pens or treated areas during the time the treatment is being applied. Too much salt is said to be poisonous to certain animals, especially fowls.

5. Fleas in the basement of the house may be controlled by:

- (a) Destruction of the fleas on the household pets.
- (b) Scattering salt lightly over the floor and wetting it down, or spraying lightly with creosote oil or some other equally effective insecticide.