

Post Rock Extension District Column

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They are Back! Warming Weather Brings Ticks Out Early

Ticks and the pathogens they transmit are a significant concern for both humans and animals alike. Controlling tick populations can be difficult because a large part of their lives is spent off the animal host or on hosts we have little control over, like deer, rabbits, and other animals. Between feeding periods, ticks are found in brush or tall grasses, especially around water areas and streams. High humidity, the presence of protective leaf litter, and animals moving through the area provide a perfect habitat for ticks.

Burning pastures in the Flint Hills can significantly reduce tick populations, with burning early in the spring while ticks are still overwintering being the most effective (Salazar et al., 2024). The impact of burning is immediate, with reduced tick numbers lasting the growing season after the burn. Female ticks lay thousands of eggs, and tick populations can rebound very quickly if burning isn't maintained. When burning, pay special attention to thickets and areas of dense plant growth. Eastern redcedars are a tick hot spot (Noden et al., 2021) and an area often visited by animals. Alarmingly, not only are more ticks found in these areas, but they are also carrying more pathogens than those collected from surrounding pasture (Noden et al., 2021). Keep grass around buildings short and bushes trimmed and off the ground.

For on-animal tick control, fly tags can help control ear-associated ticks like Gulf Coast and spinose ear ticks. These are not effective for tick species that are on the body of the animal, like the American dog tick, which transmits Anaplasmosis. Sprays can be effective if they reach areas where ticks are attached, and tick populations are not resistant. As seen with flies, rates of pesticide resistance in ticks are also increasing. Common tick attachment sites include areas under the tail, in folds of skin, under the belly/udder areas, and dewlap. Pour-ons can also be effective but be aware that those containing macrocyclic lactone group chemicals will impact your dung beetle populations.

Protect yourself and your family while outdoors, too! Make sure you wear long pants tucked into socks and shirts with long sleeves, tucked into pants. Check yourself for ticks at the end of the day and remove any attached ticks as soon as possible. Dogs and cats should receive veterinarian-prescribed tick control products. Be careful of 'natural' remedies found on the internet, as these have not been tested for safety or efficacy. There has been a rise in garlic-based products for tick and flea control in dogs for sale on online retailers like Amazon. Garlic is not safe for dogs to consume and should not be used for flea and tick control.

Thanks to K-State Extension livestock entomologist Cassandra Olds for information on tick control. For further information, contact me at any Post Rock Extension District Offices in Beloit, Lincoln, Mankato, Osborne, or Smith Center.

Post Rock Extension District of K-State Research and Extension serves Jewell, Lincoln, Mitchell, Osborne, and Smith counties. Blaire may be contacted at blairet@ksu.edu or by calling Beloit 738-3597, Smith Center, 282-6823, Lincoln 524-4432, Mankato 378-3174, or Osborne 346-2521. Join us on Facebook at “Post Rock Extension” and remember our website is www.postrock.k-state.edu.