

Preventing and Treating Chicken Mites and Lice Naturally

By Dalia Monterroso aka The President of Chickenlandia

Chicken Keeping is a joyous experience most of the time, but there are a few problems that can be a real bummer when they happen. One of those instances is finding [mites or lice](#) on your chickens or in your coop. I can relate to how overwhelming this scenario is because despite my good practices, I've been there. Let's talk about how to prevent mites and lice in your flock as well as some natural ways to treat an infestation.



One of the questions I get asked the most when it comes to external parasites is whether or not they can infect humans or other pets. I want to put your mind at ease and let you know that in most cases the critters you find on your chickens are host specific. This means that they need birds in order to survive and reproduce. They “mite” take a nibble on you (pun intended), but thankfully they can't set up camp. Hopefully, that helps to put your mind somewhat at ease.



When parasites are found on a [visibly sick chicken](#), it's often assumed that the pests are the culprit. It's true that a serious and on-going infestation can make a chicken very sick and even kill them, but it's more likely that the chicken is compromised in another way and thus the parasites were able to take hold. The healthier the chicken, the less likely they will become infested, despite mites and/or lice having a near constant presence in the natural environment. Your first step regarding prevention is to make sure you give your chickens everything they need to thrive. Good food, healthy treats, necessary supplements, clean water, and a clean (but not sterile) coop will go a long way when it comes to preventing a parasitic infestation.



Possibly the most important action you can take in preventing mites and lice is to make sure your chickens have a place where they can dust bathe all year round. Chickens don't bathe themselves in water. Instead, they use dirt and dust to clean their bodies and feathers and ward off any critters that might come around. In the warmer months, depending on your set-up, it should be fairly easy for them to find places to dust bathe in their natural environment. However, when it's raining, snowing, or just really cold, it's harder for them to find an area to bathe. That's why I recommend making a dust bath for them. You can find a simple tutorial on how to make your own dust bath by clicking [here](#).

Another important practice is adding something to your coop bedding and nesting areas that deters or kills mites and lice. Last year, I was introduced to [Coop-Right](#), a product from Little Farmer Products that not only keeps my coop nice and fresh, but also contains the natural pesticide Diatomaceous Earth and the bug deterrent rosemary. It smells amazing and works really well in my experience. Don't use it if you are going to do deep litter, as the Diatomaceous Earth will disturb the beneficial critters needed for the composting process.



To check your chicken for mites and lice, look carefully on the back of their necks, down their back, the base of the tail, under the wings, and the vent area. If you see what looks like clumps of dirt on the feather shaft, that could be the eggs of parasites. Finding mites or lice on one chicken means it's time to treat the whole flock. Let's discuss some natural options for you.

The one treatment that I'm hearing good things about is Elector PSP. Elector PSP is spinosad, which is made from a soil bacterium. You can use it all over your chicken coop and spray it directly on your birds. One bottle of Elector PSP will last a very long time, but there is one downside: the price. At nearly \$150 per bottle, it's out of reach for many people. I think this product is a good choice if you can swing it, but remember that it's toxic to bees when wet (it dries fairly quickly).

Pyrethroids (usually Permethrin) are popular options among chicken keepers. Pyrethroids are made from the chrysanthemum flower, and thus are considered fairly natural. They work well, you can use them in the coop, and you can put them directly on your chickens (check the directions first). Pyrethroids are toxic to bees, aquatic life, and cats, so these considerations must be taken into account. I live near a waterway so I've chosen to leave pyrethroids out of my mite and lice treatment options.

My favorite go-to when it comes to treating mites and lice is Diatomaceous Earth (often abbreviated to DE). DE is a mildly abrasive, powdery substance made from the fossil remains of diatoms. It's important to use DE that has been labeled as food grade, which is made from amorphous DE and is considered generally safe (in fact, it's in many of the products we use daily). Crystalline DE, which is used in filtration and other industries, is dangerous to the lungs and not useful as a pesticide. The previously mentioned Coop-Right actually has DE in it, which makes it a great choice to treat the coop, add to your dust baths, and treat the chickens. Recently, one of my roosters had a mite infestation. One treatment of Coop-Right did the trick! Of course, I treated him twice more for good measure.



For all of these options, I would recommend thoroughly cleaning your coop, spraying or dusting your coop with whatever treatment you choose, then treating each chicken by concentrating the product on the back of the neck, under the wings, at the base of the tail, and the vent area. Do this process again in ten days (if you are using Food Grade DE or Coop-Right, do it an additional time in another ten days). Hopefully, this should cure your infestation and bring your chicken-keeping experience back to where it should be: joyous and stress-free. Good luck!