



## Coastal Plant Care

### **Are Gardeners More Prone to Lyme Disease?**

If you know a gardener, its likely you know someone with Lyme Disease. The proliferation of the deer tick (*Ixodes scapularis*) has increased cases of Lyme in our area and does not appear to be slowing. In addition, confirmed cases of Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever have been rising due to increased populations of Rocky mountain wood tick (*Dermacentor andersoni*), American dog tick (*Dermacentor variabilis*), and Brown dog tick (*Rhipicephalus sanguineus*). To understand your risk, let's examine these insects.

Deer ticks live in shady, moist areas at ground level and cling to tall grass, brush, and shrubs. They are usually no more than 18-24 inches from the soil surface. They live in lawns and gardens, especially at the edge of wooded areas and near hardscape features such as walls or patios. Deer ticks cannot jump or fly. Therefore, they do not drop onto passing people or animals as many people assume. They attach to humans and animals only by direct contact.

Once a tick gets on the skin, it generally climbs upward until it reaches a protected area. In tick-infested areas, your best protection is to avoid contact with soil, leaf litter and vegetation. However, if you garden or otherwise spend time in the outdoors, you can still protect yourself:

- Wear light-colored clothing with a tight weave to spot ticks easily. Wear enclosed shoes, long pants and long-sleeved shirts. Tuck pant legs into socks or boots and shirt into pants.
- Check clothes and any exposed skin frequently for ticks while outdoors and check again once indoors.
- Consider treating your footwear and lower pant legs with Permanone insect repellent. Follow label directions.
- Stay on cleared, well-traveled trails. Avoid contacting vegetation. Avoid sitting directly on the ground or on stone walls.
- Keep long hair tied back, especially when gardening.
- Treat "edge" areas with a tick targeting insecticide in March, May, and September. Edge areas include any shaded or moist areas of your yard. These often include the edges of your property, dense garden beds, or patio areas.

The chances of being bitten by a tick are greater during times of the year when ticks are most active. Young deer ticks, called nymphs, are active from mid-May to mid-August and are about the size of poppy seeds. Adult ticks, which are approximately the size of sesame seeds, are most active from March to mid-May and from mid-August to November. Both nymphs and adults can transmit Lyme disease. Ticks can be active any time the temperature is above freezing.

Not all deer ticks are infected with the bacteria that cause Lyme disease. Ticks can become infected if they feed on small animals that are infected. The disease can be spread when the infected tick bites a person and stays attached for a period of time. In most cases, the tick must be attached for 36 hours or more before the bacteria can be transmitted. Lyme disease does not spread from one person to another. Transfer of the bacteria from an infected pregnant woman to the fetus is extremely rare.

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In most cases, a rash resembling a bull's eye or solid patch, about two inches in diameter, appears and expands around or near the site of the bite. Sometimes, multiple rash sites appear. The early stage of Lyme disease is usually marked by one or more of the following symptoms: chills and fever, headache, fatigue, stiff neck, muscle and/or joint pain, and swollen glands. If Lyme disease is unrecognized or untreated in the early stage, more severe symptoms may occur. As the disease progresses, severe fatigue, a stiff aching neck, and tingling or numbness in the arms and legs, or facial paralysis can occur. The most severe symptoms of Lyme disease may not appear until weeks, months or years after the tick bite. These can include severe headaches, painful arthritis, swelling of the joints, and heart and central nervous system problems. If you suspect you have been bitten by a tick, it is critical to seek medical consultation as soon as possible.

### **How to Create a Tick-Resistant Garden**

There are landscape changes you can make in order to keep your property as close to a tick-free habitat as possible:

- Restrict areas where deer, rodents and ticks are common, such as forest and brush. Make them off-limits for family activities.
- Keep woodpiles away from the home.
- Remove leaf litter.
- Create open, sunny areas by pruning trees to let in more sunlight.
- Place play sets in sunny areas.
- Keep lawns mowed.
- Trim shrubs near walks and patios.
- Remove groundcover around trees.
- Surround gardens with fieldstone, gravel or lawn paths.
- Construct an eight-foot-high fence to keep deer out.
- Select deer-resistant plants for your landscape (fountain grass (*pennisetum alopecuroides*), goldenrod (*Solidago sp.*), lavender (*lavandula sp.*), mint (*mentha sp.*), nasturtium (*Tropaeolum majus*), ornamental onion (*Allium schoenoprasum*), pennyroyal (*Mentha pulegium*), blue salvia (*Salvia farinacia*), California poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*), daffodil (*Narcissus sp.*), foxglove (*Digitalis sp.*), iris (*Iris sp.*), larkspur (*Consolida ambigua*), statice (*Limonium latifolium*), veronica (*Veronica sp.*), blue flax (*Linum perenne*), globe thistle (*Echinops sp.*), hen and chicks (*Sempervivum sp.*), lambs ears (*Stachys byzantine*), red valerian (*Centranthus ruber*), rose campion (*Lychnis coronaria*), and Russian sage (*Perovskia atriplicifolia*)). Additional native deer resistant plants can be found here: <http://www.dnrec.delaware.gov/fw/Hunting/Documents/Native%20Deer%20Resistant%20Plants%2005292009.pdf>

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- Remove exotic-invasive species that deer love to browse, such as Japanese barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*).

For those with Lyme Disease or Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, you understand how debilitating these conditions can be. While planning or working in your garden, consider incorporating these measures to help protect you and your family. Happy gardening!

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