**Everything You Need to Know About Fleas**

Fleas are a problem in the Pacific Northwest year-round. Thankfully, we have a plethora of options to deal with them, both preventatively and post-infestation. The tiny insects cause bites which are itchy and swell. Many animals are highly sensitive to the bite. Excessive scratching can then lead to localized skin infections or a hot spot.

Even one flea bite can cause an allergic reaction. Fleas can also transmit parasites, including tapeworm and other infectious diseases. Be sure to get a fecal test done if your pet has had fleas and watch for rice-like or sesame-seed-looking components appearing in the stool or rectum. Note that worms can show up months after having fleas due to the flea life cycle (see below).

**Life Cycle**: One female flea can produce up to fifty eggs in just one day. Eggs then hatch into larvae within two weeks. Ranging from 5-18 days later, the larvae make a cocoon to forma pupa. Then, anywhere from a few days to a year later, a flea emerges from the cocoon. A vacant apartment or house can host flea cocoons which then hatch once carbon dioxide—the output of breathing—makes contact with it. Breaking the life cycle is key to ridding your household of the infestation. It is important to treat all the pets in the household and conduct a very thorough cleaning of your home and vehicle.

**Finding A Flea**: If you have an inkling that your furry loved one has fleas, check for flea dirt. This is the flea excrement, which feels grainy to the touch when petting your animal. There is a simple way to double check whether the speckles are actual flea dirt or just regular dirt. Wet a paper towel and if the dirt leaves a red mark (pigments from blood meal), it is in fact flea excretion. Flea dirt will typically, but not always, be found near the tail or under the collar as well as on the skin. It will also often appear to be curved or spiral in shape.

**Combating the Problem With Natural Solutions**

There are many helpful, natural ways to prevent fleas. However, even though natural ways are often much safer, they are not always as effective. At Ancient Arts, we carry a variety of useful, natural products.

**Flea Soaps and Shampoos**: Safe for cats and dogs. We carry Soapy Sophie’s Insect Repellent Bar (homemade by Dr. Darla Rewers). It is a great product to wash away any fleas or eggs and continue to repel them. We also carry Soapy Sophi’s Itchy Skin Shampoo (also homemade by Dr. Rewers) which can help relieve itchy skin.

**Parasite Dust**: Safe for cats, dogs and other animals, both large and small. This dust, which is placed along the back of the animal from head to tail, is useful in keeping flies, fleas, ticks and more at bay. Ingredients include Organic Neem, Organic Yarrow and Diatomaceous Earth.

**Vetri Science Repel Spray**: Safe for cats and dogs. This mixture of natural oils helps protect your pet against an array of insects, including fleas. Always use any products with essential oils sparingly. More is not always better.

**Theraneem** **Herbal Outdoor Spray for Pets**: This spray contains Neem leaf extracts and oils to sooth and protect dog’s skin. Unsafe for cats.

**Essential Oils**: You can place a variety of oils on a collar to help deter fleas from approaching your pet. Oils include cedar, lavender, rosemary, lemon balm, or neem. However, make certain to dilute the oils if you are planning on placing them directly on the skin. Some oils are considered toxic to pets and may overwhelm their senses. In general, it is safest for cats to only use hydrosols or aqueous extracts of plants, instead of essential oils. Anything placed on the skin will still be absorbed systemically and therefore must be detoxified by the liver. There is also the potential for pets to lick these off if placed directly onto the skin.

**Protecting Your House From Fleas**

**Diatomaceous Earth**: A naturally occurring soft sedimentary powder. Safe for humans and pets. Absorbs lipids from the waxy outer layer of insects' exoskeletons, causing them to dehydrate. Can be used inside or outside the house. There are a variety of different ways to use this product. Can be bought online, at hardware stores, or pet stores.

**Beneficial Nematodes**: Microscopic roundworms that attack insects living in the soil. They are not harmful to pets or plants. You can spread these around your yard. Can be purchased online, at hardware stores, pet stores, or do-it-yourself pest control stores.

**Borax:** This powder can be placed into carpets and hard-to-reach areas of your house where fleas and their eggs might live. Vacuum after application. Can be purchased online or in stores.

Additionally, launder all bedding, sheets, and carpets. Make sure to thoroughly dry everything. Vacuum extensively and make sure to empty the bag immediately afterwards.

**Prescription Flea Control Medication**

If there is a heavy infestation or your pet has a strong reaction to flea bites, it may be best to consider a prescription. At Ancient Arts, we carry two options.

**Capstar**: Pills for cats and dogs. This is typically used once a flea has been found. It begins working within 30 minutes of ingestion and kills most fleas within four hours. The tablet is effective for 24 hours. This pill is safe enough to be administered daily if there is a serious infestation. It can be used in conjunction with other flea prescriptions.

**Revolution**: Topical application for both cats and dogs. Revolution is administered monthly to prevent fleas, heartworm, and other parasites.

**WARNING FOR CATS.** Cats can be very sensitive to many chemicals found in flea medications. Be mindful when using these and other flea prodcuts that they are fit for feline use.

Some pets can experience a negative reaction. Symptoms may include vomiting, drooling, seizures, or diarrhea. I If this happens, wash the product off of the pet and contact an emergency veterinarian immediately.