

Checkin' for Ticks

I believe I've mentioned before how excited I am to be living in rural Bibb County, in a heavily wooded area surrounded by the Talladega National Forest. It is a blessing to be able to go right out of my back door into wooded hiking and walking areas. Adding cardio-vascular endurance value to such outings is the steeply-sloping topography of the hillsides and drainages that challenge even the most fit and able-bodied person.

I also enjoy making the drive (as I've done several times) to visit the Brierfield, Piper, or West Blocton area to enjoy on foot the natural beauty of the Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge, as well as other parts of the Cahaba watershed. Like scores of other folks, I look forward to frequenting those areas this spring to see the blooming Cahaba lilies, mountain laurel, and perhaps a few birds I've never before seen. I am also eager to help out with the Renew Our Rivers cleanup April 11-12 and the Cahaba Lily Festival in May, and I hope you will consider helping, too.

Having lived most of my life in the flatter, more open Black Belt region along U.S. Highway 80, I did encounter upon moving to Bibb County a higher frequency of one particular critter that, while it does populate my old haunts, seems to "attach" itself in higher frequencies here...I'm talking about the beloved tick. Actually I've seen several varieties of ticks here, although fortunately most of them appeared on my dogs rather than myself, or another member of my human family.

Regional Extension Agent for Family and Child Development Sallie Lide-Hooker shared the following childhood memory of getting ticks---which many of us can relate to---as well as some tips for safely ridding yourselves of them....

With our days swapping from cold to hot (my Mother called it pneumonia weather), many of us develop an early case of spring fever. This includes our children who are ready to play outside. Even Country Singer Brad Paisley has elevated the lowly tick with his song, "Ticks!" I can remember as a child getting a tick behind my ear, thanks to my Daddy's faithful bird dog "Sport." Mama tried to remove it herself, but the tick hung on, broke as she was trying to remove it, so a trip to the family doctor was required. That's why I recall the event so well!

Although most ticks are harmless, some are carriers of Lyme disease, Rocky Mountain spotted fever and other infections. To be safe, always check your skin and scalp and that of your children after spending time outdoors. This winter has been mild enough that ticks may not have been adversely affected. If a tick is found on you or your child before it burrows into the skin, it can be picked up with your fingers and either flushed or crushed. Be sure to wash your hands afterward.

If it attaches to the skin, cover the insect completely with petroleum jelly or salad oil. This closes off the ticks breathing holes, causing it to let go in about thirty minutes. When it lets go, remove it from the skin and kill it. When the tick has been removed, wash the bite site with soap and water, and apply an antibiotic ointment. Monitor the bite area and if a fever develops, joints swell, there is a red ring, bleeding or pain, consult your physician or pediatrician for your child.

If you have questions, you can reach Sallie Lide-Hooker at (334) 874-7269 or (334) 201-7636. Or, for more information, you can visit www.aces.edu or call our office at 205-926-3117. Mrs. Hooker's source for the above tips is *vitalityNOTES*.

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