

## Least-toxic Control of Chiggers

Chiggers are bright red mites about 1 mm in length. During their larval stage, they are parasitic to vertebrates including humans.

Chiggers commonly inhabit thickly vegetated and damp, shady areas such as in tall grass, along forest edges, and in wild blackberry patches. They can also live on lawns and golf courses. Chiggers wait in these areas and transfer to a host as it brushes by them. On humans, this is usually in areas where clothing is tight: the waist, crotch, armpits and ankles.

After transferring to a host, a chigger will insert digestive juices into skin cells and ingest the cell contents. Skin will start itching about three to six hours after being bitten. Chiggers do not suck blood, and do not burrow into the skin. After a few days, they will simply drop off their host.

Peak chigger activity occurs from late spring to early fall.

### Prevention

- When entering an area that may be inhabited with chiggers, close off all openings in clothing. Tuck socks into pants, wear rubber bands on sleeves around the wrists, and wear zippered clothing rather than buttons.
- After being in a susceptible area, shower with warm soapy water, and scrub possibly infested skin. If you can't shower right away, rub your skin down with a towel.
- Wash all clothing and blankets in water 125 degrees or above.

### Control

- If you do become infested, **scrub away the chiggers**. Afterwards, carefully examine skin with a magnifying lens to make sure all chiggers have been removed.
- If you feel it is absolutely necessary to use a chemical, the safest to use is **sulfur**. An effective mixture is 6% precipitated sulfur in a Vaseline™ or other petrolatum base. You will most likely need a prescription to obtain this from a pharmacist. Two drugs are available: Mitigal™ which contains 25% organically combined sulfur, however this is liable to produce a sulfur dermatitis. Tetmosol™ is used on children but is slow in action. You can make your own mixture. Purchase precipitated sulfur from a plant nursery, or technical-grade sulfur from a chemical supply house. Combine with a petrolatum, Eucerin™, Aquaquaphor™ or a vanishing cream.

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- To control chiggers on your lawn, **keep your grass cut low and prune vegetation.**
- **Decreasing overall moisture** will make the area less attractive to chiggers.
- Continue these practices year after year as chiggers burrow into soil during the winter months and may re-infest an area in the spring.

### **References**

Beyond Pesticides/NCAMP. "Least Toxic Control of Pests In the Home & Garden: A series of pest control & chemical factsheets." Washington, DC.

Olkowski, Helga, Daar, Shiela, and Olkowski, William, *Common-Sense Pest Control*, Newtown: The Taunton Press, Inc., 1991.

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