DON’T GET TICKED by Lyn Chimera

On January 24th several Master Gardeners and about 40 members of the public attended an informational program about ticks given by Lynn Braband from the NY-SIPM program at Cornell. He covered the myths and facts. It was fascinating and scary at the same time. Lyme Disease is now the most common vector-borne disease in the US. It needs to be taken seriously.

Ticks have 8 legs and are classified as arachnids (not insects) thus related to spiders and mites. There are 3 types of ticks in our area:

- American dog tick which carries Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, prefers grasslands
- Black legged tick (deer tick) which carries Lyme disease prefers woods and wood edges
- Lone star tick – migrating on birds as our climate warms prefers dry areas

All these ticks spread a variety of diseases but it is only the deer tick that carries Lyme.

Ticks hitch a ride on people and animals through an “ambush” technique. They can’t jump, fly or drop from trees so rely on grabbing on as you pass by. A tick will crawl to the end of a leaf or blade of grass from ground level to 1 ½ feet off the ground, hold on with their back legs and reach forward with their front 2 elongated legs to grab a hold on whatever passes by. Walking in the middle of paths so you don’t brush up against vegetation is a good way to avoid these hitch hikers. Long pants tucked into socks is another good method. Lynn suggested putting all clothing in a dryer on high as soon as you come in. The heat will kill the ticks. Spraying with DEET is most effective of the insecticides. He also recommended taking a shower within half an hour after coming in. This can possibly wash off ticks as well as give you the opportunity to check yourself.

Some interesting facts:

- Deer are just a host for ticks to reproduce, they don’t carry Lyme Disease
- June and July are the highest months for tick activity although they can be active all year any day that’s above 40 degrees.
- Tick larva don’t carry Lyme. They have to take a blood meal on an infected host.
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- Most ticks have a 2 year life cycle.
- Wearing light colored clothes makes them easier to spot.
- A tick does NOT have to be on you for 36 hours for you to become infected. The longer it is on you the higher your chance of getting Lyme.

Ticks inject a numbing agent so you can’t feel them bite.

To check if you have ticks in your yard drag a 2ft. x 3ft. piece of white flannel or corduroy across the area then check it for ticks.

The presentation was followed by a panel discussion and Q&A.

For more information: https://nysipm.cornell.edu/whats-bugging-you/ticks/