



Keep fleas out of your house

by Isabel Basson

Fleas might not be a problem on your cows, but they are a huge pest in the house. Not only is their itchy bite a nuisance, but it can also cause serious diseases. Many years ago nearly a quarter of Europe's people died of the plague. This was because fleas from infected rats bit the people. The hot, dry weather with rains in between creates the perfect climate for fleas to breed.

Fleas are blood-sucking parasites that live on animals. They have been around for about 100 million years, that is since dinosaurs walked the earth! There are more than 2 000 known flea species in the world, but the most common is the cat and dog flea. Fleas are very small and are difficult to see and catch, since they can move very fast and their flat body is very difficult to get a hold on. Fleas jump – some can even jump up to 150 times their own length.

Fleas are well-adjusted to live in your home for a very long time. They can live for more than 100 days without a blood meal. On average, the flea lives for two to three months. Fleas have four life stages – they start out as an egg, then they become larvae, pupae and then adult fleas. Therefore it is important to not only kill the adult fleas, but also the fleas in other stages of development.

The female flea drinks more than 15 times her weight in blood every day. She can lay more than 2 000 eggs in her lifetime, so if you see one flea, there may be hundreds of others too. The eggs of fleas take seven days to become adult fleas. Only the adult flea sucks blood from animals. The larvae live and feed in the animal's surroundings. This means that the fleas breed in your house, in carpets, cracks in walls, in beds, the dog's kennels, almost anywhere where animals live.

It is important to treat fleas in and around your home, and on your pets regularly. There are a lot of products available that can help you get rid of the fleas. Remember that you should not only kill the adult fleas, or else you will have the same problem in a couple of weeks when the eggs hatch. There are products that kill fleas in all their life stages. Read the packaging of the product you want to use carefully to make sure that you buy the right kind of product for the problem. **UM**