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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MOSQUITO CONTROL—WHAT DOESN'T WORK

Since 2001, West Nile Virus has made its presence known in Illinois. The virus, which causes a form of encephalitis, can produce no symptoms in humans or can lead to serious illness, particularly among the elderly or those with reduced immune systems.

The key to limiting the spread of the disease is to control the house mosquito (*Culex pipiens*) breeding sites. Standing water for more than five days allows the mosquitoes to develop. Efforts to eliminate standing and stagnate water will cut down on the mosquito population.

With any community-wide concern, there are always remedies and methods that pop up that get more positive attention than they really are worth. Many efforts simply aren't effective, or can actually make problems worse.

Bug zappers and ultrasonic buzzers haven't proved effective in any trials. In many cases, the light produced by bug zappers may actually attract more insects to the area than would have been present without the device being used.

Commonly seen in Sunday newspaper supplements are "Mosquito Plants", a type of citronella-scented geranium that's reputed to repel mosquitoes. It's true the plants will repel mosquitoes if the leaves are crushed. Unfortunately, it seems to work only within a few feet of the plant, and only for a short time, if at all.

Remember, there is no invisible wall or force field that a plant can create. Mosquitoes fly; plants do not.

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Bats and various birds such as purple martins are noted for their mosquito control. In reality, there is little scientific evidence that the bats and birds do a sufficient job reducing the mosquito population around the home.

Purple martins are active during the day. The house mosquito flies from dusk to dawn. Bats will eat mosquitoes but prefer larger insects such as moths.

This does not mean they won't eat the insects. Just don't rely on the birds and bats to control the pests effectively. They are just one tool.

While some fish, including minnows and goldfish, will feed on mosquito larva, Koi will not. Koi are bottom feeders. Mosquito larvae are found on the water's surface.

What should you do?

- Make sure that doors and windows have tight-fitting screens. Repair damaged screens. Screens should be a 16 mesh, which means 16 wires per inch. Caulk around loose fitting doors and windows.
- Remove all discarded tires and dispose of cans, plastic containers, ceramic pots and similar water-holding containers. Tires used as swings should have holes drilled or poked through the rubber to allow water to drain. Hundreds of mosquitoes can come from one tire.
- Make sure roof gutters and downspouts drain properly and are kept clean of leaves and debris. Gutters should be checked twice a year.
- Clean and chlorinate swimming pools, outdoor saunas and hot tubs regularly.
- Drain water from pool covers.
- Change the water in birdbaths at least once a week.
- Turn over plastic wading pools, wheelbarrows, buckets and watering cans when not in use.
- Clean ditches of obstructions so they drain properly. Keep weeds and grass mowed.

- Eliminate any standing water that collects on your properties. All it takes is 5 days for mosquitoes to develop.
- Check trees for cavities that hold water and fill them with soil, gravel or sand.
- Remind or help neighbors to eliminate breeding sites on their properties. Check on the elderly regularly.
- Avoid being outside between dusk and dawn, when mosquitoes are likely to be biting.
- When outdoors, wear light-colored clothing, long-sleeved shirts or jackets, long slacks, socks and shoes.
- Use mosquito repellent containing DEET according to label directions (no more than 30 percent DEET for adults and 10 percent or less for children).

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This information provided by David Robson, Extension Educator, Horticulture, Springfield Center; Rhonda Ferree, Unit Leader, Fulton County; and Dr. Phil Nixon, Extension Entomologist.