

# Got Bugs? Get Answers!



Choose less toxic products for a healthy home and garden

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Look for this symbol before you buy

**“Our Water Our World”** is a partnership between nurseries, hardware stores and public agencies to raise awareness of less toxic ways to manage pests to prevent pesticide runoff into the streams, creeks and waterways. This year it has played a very active role in mosquito prevention.

2005... West Nile Virus (WNV), a mosquito borne disease, had found it's way into the state the year before and was expected to surge this year. The extent would be based on the amount of rainfall. 2005... a year with a record of the highest rainfall totals in over 40 years and late season rains to cap it off. The ideal environment for the spread of WNV was now in place. Indeed, mosquito populations reached levels never before recorded in the history of California.

The wealthier, more populated counties were planning strategies to contain the problem. The three most effective processes were to educate the public, remove the standing water, which is where mosquitoes breed, and to directly control the spread of the disease primarily through the use of larvacides, to prevent the mosquitoes from reaching maturity.

However, some less-populated counties like Mendocino, do not have a Mosquito Abatement program. This is a 'win' story about what a community can do, even with minimal resources, if they come together. It all began when I met with Mike Sweeney from Mendocino Solid Waste Authority, the county coordinator for the Our Water Our World to discuss what the community was going to do to create an Anti-West Nile Virus Campaign.

Mike Sweeney first contacted Tony Linegar, assistant Agricultural Commissioner, and John Rogers Director of Environmental Health to discuss forming a West Nile Taskforce. Within one week, the taskforce was created. A protocol was established and a sheet was developed to direct the public on using appropriate means to control the spread of West Nile Virus.

An additional sheet was created that listed less toxic products, as found on the Our Water Our World Mosquito Fact Sheet. Tony Linegar created the list of products specified for the County and arranged to have them printed for distribution to the whole community.

# A Community Pulls Together To Fight West Nile Virus

By Annie Joseph CCNPRO



## KEEPING MOSQUITOES AWAY FROM YOU AND YOUR YARD

**M**osquitoes are delicious food for fish and other aquatic creatures, but their buzzing and itchy bites make them a great annoyance to people. Mosquitoes can also carry a variety of diseases, so controlling them, especially by eliminating breeding sites, should be a priority for everyone in the community.

The emergence of West Nile virus (the new information, see inside) has focused public attention on mosquitoes. Fear may cause us to reach for a pesticide spray can, but this is an ineffective control. Pesticide sprays and relatively few mosquitoes, and instead, they probably cause more harm to beneficial insects. Residents can have a greater effect on the numbers of mosquitoes in urban areas by following the tips in this fact sheet.

The young (larvae) of mosquitoes live in water and feed on microorganisms and organic matter. Just about any area or container that holds water for more than a few days can produce a large crop of mosquitoes. Only adult female mosquitoes bite humans and

**Note:** If you are experiencing serious or persistent mosquito problems, call your municipal or vector control district (see inside) before considering the use of pesticides.

other animals to feed on blood. Adult male mosquitoes feed on flower nectar. There are many different species of mosquitoes. Some bite during the day, while others feed at night. Although some mosquitoes can fly long distances from their water breeding sites, others travel only a short distance to feed their blood meals. Your bites may be coming from mosquitoes you are raising in your own backyard.

### PREVENTION

The most effective way to control mosquitoes is to feed and eliminate their breeding sites.

- **Eliminate standing water in containers around the home,** including water in cans, plastic containers, potted plant saucers, buckets, garbage cans, barrels, wheelbarrows, and any other container that holds water for more than a few days. Empty the water and then either cover, cover porch drainage holes in, or dispose of these containers.
- **Change water in birdbaths and pet water dishes at least once a week,** preferably every 2 to 3 days.

- **Fix leaky outdoor faucets and sprinklers,** and don't overwater your yard. Any standing water can produce mosquitoes.

- **Recycle tires or store them so they do not collect water.** Tires are extremely hard to drain, and each one can produce thousands of mosquitoes.

- **Keep roof gutters clean so water drains,** otherwise mosquitoes can breed in the leaf and water mixture.

- **Don't dump yard waste into street gutters, storm drains, or creeks.** It can impede the flow of water allowing mosquitoes to breed. The decaying organic matter that provides food for dense numbers of growing mosquito larvae.

- **Drain plastic swimming pools or fountains when not in use,** or cover tightly to deny access to mosquitoes. If the fountain is large enough, stock with mosquitofish (see below).

- **Keep swimming pools and hot tubs chlorinated and filtered.** When not in use for extended periods, cover pools to take night or week with mosquitofish (see below). One unattended pool or hot tub can breed enough mosquitoes to affect a whole neighborhood.

- **Use mosquitofish (Gambusia affinis) in backyard ponds or water gardens, watering troughs, and stockpiles.** These fish are available, at no cost, from your mosquito and vector control district (see inside).



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Meanwhile, John Rogers of the Dept. of Health and I worked to enlist the support of the stores in the area. 13 Mendocino County Nurseries and Hardware stores from the Our Water Our World program joined in this effort. They realized the need for community awareness and a plan that would reduce mosquito populations without polluting streams and creeks with pesticide runoff. John sent a letter encouraging the stores to bring in the less toxic products for their communities to use to fight West Nile Virus. A great public/private partnership was shaping up and the people and the natural resources of Mendocino County were the beneficiaries. I also contacted several stores that were considered to be good prospects to carry mosquito fish for use in their local areas. Anderson Valley Feed in Philo, and Growing Concern in Gualala quickly offered to build holding ponds for the fish, joining existing fish supplier Spare Time Supply in Willits. Mosquito fish are an excellent control for mosquito larvae in ponds and water gardens...they can consume up to 500 mosquito larvae per day.

I also worked with the stores to promote the local campaign and to encourage them to bring additional products into their inventories such as larvacides and insect repellants. Marten Van Royen, L&L's rep for Mendocino County, played a critical role making sure the stores accessed the products they needed.

Most of the stores offered to make off-shelf displays for the less toxic products. The sense of urgency and pride in their community sped things along quickly. In the third week of the local campaign, I distributed local West Nile Literature and additional mosquito fact sheets for their displays. I was overwhelmed at the energy and caring that the stores exhibited. Many stores made hand painted signs alerting the public to dump the standing water on their properties.

At Spare Time Supply in Willits, a massive display

was made, taking up most of the retail sales area. The manager, Diana, made a painting of a mosquito that was 3 feet across. That certainly grabbed the attention of the customers! At Mendo Mill, Rayana, Garden Department Manager made a large endcap with all types of home repair materials to keep mosquitoes out and porch lights designed to deter mosquitoes. She also helped prepare a checklist for West Nile Prevention that reminded people to help their elderly neighbors to check their yards for standing water. The elderly are most susceptible to more serious effects of West Nile Virus.

At Friedman Bros. Home Improvement in Ukiah, Jason the Garden Department Manager, made a large display of Mosquito Dunks at the entry to the garden department and laminated the letter from the Dept of Health for all to see.

Shiela and Sherry at North Star Nursery made sure to display the additional materials near the register so no one would miss seeing the important message from the County. In Fort Bragg, Rossi's Ace, Hare Creek Nursery, and Heartwood Nursery brought in and displayed new less toxic products for the fight against WNV. Everyone was preparing to protect their community.

The campaign in Mendocino County still goes on as we progress into the fall. It has been a heartwarming experience and evidence that committed individuals in the community, business, and government can join together to make a difference. You can make a difference in your community. Start in your own yard and help those in your neighborhood who cannot do the work themselves.

Products used in West Nile Prevention Campaign: Summitt Mosquito Dunks, Summitt Mosquito Bits, Microbelift, Carefree Mosquito Free Water, Mosquito Repellents.

