

Chiggers

As you may know, we have quite a chigger problem at the garden. I'll give just a brief summary here of what you can do to avoid them, and treat the itch if you don't succeed in avoiding them. Lee Morrison did some research on the topic. I scoured through his findings and my own, resulting in the summary below.

Clothing – Wear long pants, long sleeves, long socks and closed shoes. Put rubber bands over you pant legs at the ankle and tuck in your shirt.

If they succeed in making contact, the larva remains attached to a suitable host for three to five days before dropping off to begin its nymph stage. After working in the garden, take a hot soapy bath or shower and wash your garden clothes asap to remove the larvae.

There are natural insect repellents, but you might have to do some trial and error to find what you can tolerate and what works best for you. I have found products containing Neem Oil to be somewhat effective. The vitamin section at our local Sprouts market has some offerings that might work for you.

Here's some recommendations I've read about but have not tested: "Dust your shoes, pant legs, and socks with powdered sulfur. It's available at any nursery or feed store. Rubbing the crushed flowers of lemonmint on your clothing will also repel chiggers."

Chiggers attach to the host, pierce the skin, inject enzymes into the bite wound that digest cellular contents, and then suck up the digested tissue through a tube formed by hardened skin cells called a stylostome. They do not burrow into the skin or suck blood.

You may not know you've been "bitten" until a couple or few days after contact when you start itching and find red welts, usually around your ankles, back of knees, waist, or any place where you have folds in your skin.

It is the chiggers' digestive enzymes in the saliva that cause "the insanely itchy welts". Because chigger wounds are a complex combination of enzymatic and resulting mechanical damage, plus allergy and immune responses, plus possible secondary bacterial infection subject to local influences, no one remedy works equally well for most people.

Some sources say stop the itching with baking soda, vinegar, or aloe vera. In some cases, the itching can be alleviated through use of over-the-counter topical corticosteroids and antihistamines.

Treating the soil for chiggers is usually not recommended because it would be difficult to target the specific locations and determine the best timing. Sulfur might be used, but excess sulfur will kill or severely imbalance the microorganisms in the soil, especially if the soil is acidic. Preventive measures include watering dry soil and keeping the area free of weeds and weed debris.

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