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Using Diatomaceous Earth to Control Fleas

By Ramona D. Marek, MS Ed

Food grade diatomaceous earth (DE) is an effective way to get rid of fleas without exposing your dog to toxins.

If your dog has fleas and you're looking for an effective, natural, non-toxic way to do away with them, diatomaceous earth (DE) is a good solution. Diatomaceous earth is a silky-fine powder made from the fossilized remains of tiny aquatic organisms called diatoms. The sharp edges of the diatoms cut through the hard exoskeletons of fleas, acting as a desiccant or drying agent, effectively killing the fleas and their larvae.



Because of the way it works, it is considered a mechanical killer as opposed to a chemical killer, which makes it safer for your dog or cat. DE products are registered for use against fleas, ticks, bedbugs, spiders, cockroaches, and other pests.

Use Food Grade Diatomaceous Earth

There are over 150 registered diatomaceous earth products for use in and around homes, gardens, farms and kennels, and some that may be applied directly to dogs and cats. However, only food grade diatomaceous earth is recommended for direct application.

“There are three classifications for diatomaceous earth: food grade, feed grade, and industrial grade,” says Jodi Ziskin, Healthy Pet Coach. “It is imperative that only food grade diatomaceous earth be used in and on animals and people and around the house. Food grade diatomaceous earth must meet specifications for how much heavy metal can be present; there must be less than 10mg/kg of lead and arsenic in the diatomaceous earth. Feed grade diatomaceous earth does not adhere to these rules. Industrial grade diatomaceous earth has been treated with very high heat, causing its silicon dioxide to

change to crystalline silica, which can be dangerous and harmful to the health of all animals, including humans.”

How To Use Diatomaceous Earth

1. On the Animal

Food grade diatomaceous earth is non-toxic to humans and animals and may be directly applied to animals, although caution needs to be used in certain cases. Because it is a desiccant, it may cause issues in animals (and people) with asthma or other respiratory problems. Jodi recommends that people with respiratory conditions wear a mask when applying DE. Avoid putting it directly on an animal with respiratory problems, or at the very least keep it away from his face. It is also best not to apply diatomaceous earth to the animal if he has dry or irritated skin.

If the animal doesn't have respiratory or skin problems, food grade diatomaceous earth can be rubbed into his coat, but it's still important to keep it away from his eyes and muzzle. After one day, give him a bath with a natural, gentle shampoo to get rid of the dead fleas and prevent dry skin.

2. In the House

“Though it can be used on pets, DE is really best for use in the environment,” says veterinarian Dr. Elissa Katz. “It dries out the eggs of the insects so they can't reproduce. Eggs typically are not found on animals, but more so in the environment – for example, where the animal sleeps or comes in and out the house and shakes. We typically recommend a large saltshaker type of container to apply diatomaceous earth, although it can get a little dusty if it's shaken too much.”

There are a few considerations to follow for the most effective use of diatomaceous earth in the home. Vacuum thoroughly before applying it to carpets, bare floors, furniture, etc., and dispose of the vacuum contents outside. Apply it using the shaker method, or use a sock or sieve, and put it on all floor surfaces, animal bedding and furniture. Also pay attention to corners, nooks and crannies. Dr. Katz recommends leaving diatomaceous earth on floors, carpets and even furnishings for up to two weeks before vacuuming.

While it is setting in to the home environment, Jodi recommends the following: “Remove fleas from your animal using a flea comb and a bowl of soapy water to drown the fleas. You may miss a few, and that's where having diatomaceous earth all over the house comes in — as your dog or cat comes into contact with the floor or bedding, the diatomaceous earth will kill any remaining fleas/ticks.”

3. In the Yard

Diatomaceous earth is safe to use in the yard although larger quantities are needed to be effective. Its effectiveness also varies according to the weather and climate. It's important to keep in mind that it doesn't work when wet. In humid areas, like the Pacific Northwest or the Southeast, it needs to be reapplied more often than in arid areas like California or Arizona.

“Keep in mind that, like any other pest prevention method, the process does have to be repeated,” says Jodi. Regular trimming of hedges, shrubs and grass also helps tamp down fleas and other pests.

Fleas may be a part of life, but we don't have to put up with them in our homes or on our animals, nor do we have to resort to harsh chemicals for pest control. DE is an effective, non-toxic way to get rid of fleas with resorting to harmful chemicals

Where To Find DE

Several companies sell food grade diatomaceous earth that can be used for flea control.

- “Our *Crawling Insect Control Diatomaceous Earth* can be applied directly to bedding, kennels or even the animal himself,” says Andrew Hemmer of [Earthworks Health Products](#). “For flea control indoors, we recommend applying it to the entire coat of the animal (avoiding the face and eyes) and then rub it down to the skin as best you can. Do this for two weeks...and also apply a thin, even and visible application to his bedding, and the flooring, rugs or upholstery near the bedding. When two weeks are over with, you may vacuum and clean your animal off.”
- *True Raw Choice Diatomaceous Earth* from [Your True Companion Pet Products](#) (ca) is another choice. “When lightly rubbed into their coats and dusted in your pets’ area, food grade diatomaceous earth is very effective against lice, mites, fleas and ticks on dogs and cats,” says the company’s literature. “If your pet has fleas, apply every four days for about 12 days and dust all their bedding and living areas.”

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