

## **Making Ripples**

### **Natural Repellants for Insect Pests, Wildlife and Pets**

by Amanda Bancroft

If you'd like to keep your garden organic but free of pests, or if you're simply looking for a way to discourage pets from getting into trouble, there are plenty of easy-to-find natural repellants. There is also the option of making inexpensive sprays from scratch, often with common kitchen ingredients.

Basil repels flies, and can help around the grill or patio. It may also discourage cats from cuddling with you while you're trying to work. Another kitty repellant is the scent of mint, such as in extract or candles. Without even lighting a peppermint candle, place it where you don't want fluffy to sit (like in front of the computer screen). But if you want to attract cats and eliminate cockroaches, use catnip – it does both!

Other discouraging smells can be found in the kitchen, too, even though they are pleasant to humans. Sage can repel ticks. Oregano repels a plethora of pests. Garlic and onions keep out a variety of critters (including your significant other, perhaps). Chamomile makes flying insects fly away. Rosemary controls mosquitoes, slugs, snails and more. Cayenne pepper spices up the lives of any squirrel at a bird feeder (birds can't feel the heat) and can be sprinkled dry or used as a spray around the stems and leaves of plants to prevent wildlife and insects from eating your garden.

Like cayenne, cinnamon is often found on spice racks and repels ants. Vinegar also repels ants by disrupting their chemical trails (it's very fun to watch their confusion). Mix vinegar with another ant repellant like citrus for the best results. To make a lemon spray that fleas hate, boil sliced lemons with their skin on, let it steep several hours, pour it into a spray bottle and spray where fleas are a problem.

Lemongrass repels mosquitoes because it contains citronella, which is a natural oil that repels insects and often used in outdoor candles. Lavender is great for aromatherapy, but not so great for fire ants. If they've infested your car, lavender essential oil may encourage them to go live elsewhere. It does not kill their mounds. Lavender can also be used on fire ant bites to soothe the burning itch, but be sure to ask professional advice in order to use it safely.

Bar soap quite effectively keeps wasps and bees from building hives inside mailboxes, bird nest boxes, and other surfaces where they aren't welcome. Rub it across the inside roof in the spring to prevent them from starting to build. Works like a charm! Even though many of these plants have repellant properties for a variety of pests, keep in mind that they themselves may be

susceptible to getting munched by other garden insects and that results vary from person to person.

Amanda Bancroft is a writer, artist, and naturalist building an off-grid cottage for land conservation on Mt. Kessler. She and her husband Ryan blog about their adventures and offer a solar-hosted online educational center on how to make a difference with everyday choices at: [www.RipplesBlog.org](http://www.RipplesBlog.org).