

## **Mosquitoes**

Our late summer weather, including Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee, resulted in conditions ideal for mosquitoes. Virtually the entire east coast has had a population explosion over the past several weeks. The extraordinary amounts of rain filled every possible habitat with standing water; just what a female mosquito needs to lay her eggs. But before she lays the eggs, she needs one thing, a nutritious meal. And that is why they swarm to bite us: blood is a nutrient-rich food.

Swarms of mosquitoes are likely to be with us until freezing temperatures end their life cycles. But in the meantime there are steps we can take. Make your home and yard less inviting by emptying anything holding water — flower pots, cans, old tires, etc. If you have bird baths empty and refill them at least every few days. When working in the yard, keep covered, wear a hat and long sleeve shirt and pants. Use a repellent. There are a number of products, including those containing DEET, that are effective and generally safe.

Besides being a terrible nuisance, some mosquitoes can transmit serious diseases, including malaria. Each day, malaria kills some 3,000 children in Africa. While malaria is not a concern in these northern latitudes, West Nile virus is. So far the disease is not common and is not usually serious except for a small percentage of infected people, usually those older than 50. It is important to keep this disease from becoming more prevalent. Besides harming people, West Nile can cause high mortality in certain birds, notably crows. Removing breeding sites and avoiding bites will help control the disease and limit its impact on people and the environment.