

Diatomaceous Earth for Flea Control by Dr. John Fudens HMC DVM PH

Diatomaceous earth is completely natural. It's made from the fossilized remains of tiny algae-like organisms called diatoms ("DI-a-tomz") that lived in ancient lakes, rivers, and oceans. Today, diatoms are mined to manufacture the soft white or off-white powder that has slightly abrasive properties.

Silica (or silicon dioxide) occurs as one of the two most abundant elements found in the Earth's crust. Silica sand is used to make concrete and mortar. It is also used as a fine grinding polish for glass and stone, in foundry molds, and in glass-making. Silica gel is often used as a desiccant, something that removes moisture.

The silica powder made from DE feels soft to our fingers but, in fact, is like microscopic concertina wire for insects. Tiny razor-sharp edges cut down any small-scaled intruder that attempts to cross a perimeter.

It might surprise you to know that diatomaceous earth comes in a food grade form that is safe and healthy for human consumption. [CAUTION: Non-food grade diatomaceous earth is NOT SAFE to be inhaled or ingested.]. This means the commercial form that is used to filter pools.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) strictly regulates food grade DE, for obvious reasons. Lives are at stake. Products must be clean, uncontaminated, and safe for internal bodily use. Non-food grade DE is used mostly as an agricultural and household insecticide.

How does DE work? The small sharp shells of DE scratch the wax coating of insect skeletons causing the insect to lose body moisture and die. Death is caused by dehydration and can take up to 12 hours to work although most of the time sooner. Since no other life forms have waxy coatings and body joints like insects, only insects are affected. Also because DE does not contain pyrethrums or other chemicals/poisons it is much less likely to harm beneficial insects like honey bees.

DE can be used to control all the harmful insects in our environment. It is natural and nontoxic so it is safe to use around pets and children. We advise clients to sprinkle it on pets to control fleas and in the home for roaches, fleas and other insects.

There are two forms of DE used today. The commercial form is used as a water filter in pools and for drinking. This form is not used for insect control. The food grade form is the only form to use for parasite control. It can be mixed in food for eliminating internal

parasites. DE is also used as a soil conditioner because it breaks up hard earth like heavy clay and over worked land.

As with any fine powder you should avoid breathing the dust. Covering mouth and nose with a handkerchief works fine. I find this is not necessary if you are gentle in how you use or spread the powder around.

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