

Mosquito-Proof

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Your Home, Your Neighbourhood, Your Island - Every morning, I open my eyes and see at least six motionless mosquitoes waiting for me to emerge from the blue tulle net that covers my bed. They're female, I know, because only female mosquitoes are the vampiric ones, needing blood for egg development, while the vegan males feed on nectar.

"Good morning, ladies," I say before smacking each one between the wall and netting, leaving either the flaky, leggy carcass of an unfed mosquito or the red-orange, splatter of an engorged mother-to-be.

Looking at the fresh vermilion blots, I wonder whose blood, brought into my room by these flying hypodermic needles, now graces my white walls—my housemate's? The cat's? Or did it come from one of the goats I hear bleating through my shuttered doors?

The fact I've grown accustomed to this morning ritual bothers me. I don't like having someone else's or something else's blood on my wall, mosquito net and hand. With the reality of dengue fever, I'm ready to do everything necessary to reduce the number of mosquitoes I have to swat each morning.

I'm wary of repellents and mosquito coils, the two prevention methods I commonly see employed on the island. After the last time I used a DEET-based bug repellent cloth, I touched the left-click button on my laptop, and the chemicals ate away a spot on the painted coating. The idea of putting paint remover on my body does not particularly appeal to me. Nor does the idea of breathing in the fumes of a mosquito coil. A September 2003 article in *Environmental Health Perspectives* reported that some mosquito coils are so unhealthy that "the formaldehyde from burning one coil can be as high as that released from burning 51 cigarettes."

Besides, sprays and coils only keep mosquitoes away. I want to seriously decrease their numbers.

Dengue: Public and Clinical Health Aspects, a report published by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommends community-based prevention efforts to keep mosquito populations at low levels. *Aedes aegypti*, the only mosquito that acts as a vector for the dengue virus, recognizable by the white stripes or bands on its black legs and body, dwells in enclosed, human-inhabited indoor spaces, making any sort of prevention by outdoor mass spraying completely useless. Even indoor spraying can be ineffective. The CDC's report claims that insecticides may only temporarily paralyze the mosquitoes, giving them the appearance of being dead but allowing them to fly away after the paralysis wears off. So, after spraying mosquitoes indoors, it is necessary to squash them, wash them away or fry them with an electric tennis racket to ensure they are indeed dead.

But the most effective method for controlling the *Aedes aegypti* population is by reducing potential larva development sites. The CDC suggests that every time we spot an adult mosquito, we should wonder where it may have laid its eggs, prompting us to look around for places where water collects. Female mosquitoes will lay their eggs in containers with as little as a teaspoonful of clean standing water.

Aedes aegypti mosquitoes mostly stay indoors and prefer to lay their eggs in artificial receptacles instead of natural ones, so I pay special attention to the wet areas inside my home. I squeegee the tile shelf of my alfresco shower, scour the bottoms of garbage bins, wipe dry the strainer beneath the dish drying rack, tilt the tray below the barbecue so the water streams out of it and scrub the sponge holder by the sink. I also check around pipes for possible leaks. Because the egg to larva cycle takes about a week, I have to repeat this process vigilantly. Also, I make sure I don't simply empty the water from the containers; I scour them because the eggs will stick to the plastic and ceramic walls.

A December 2008 press release from the BVI Environmental Health Division (EHD) recommends sealing cisterns with concrete and covering downspouts with mosquito netting or cloth. They also suggest weekly cleaning of gutters and pets' water bowls. For those who have to store quantities of water because of water supply outages in town, containers should be scrubbed once a week or kept covered.

Both the CDC's and the BVI EHD's reports stress the importance of full compliance. We all need to make an effort to eliminate mosquito larva development sites.

The other night while hanging out in town on a friend's porch, I noticed a rainwater-filled plastic cup sitting on the tiles. I looked inside and saw dozens of tiny larvae, often called "wigglers" on the surface. I showed it to my friend Chris, who made an unintelligible noise of disgust, grabbed the cup out of my hand and dumped it over the railing onto the concrete, killing all the potential dengue vectors.

Every possible water-collecting vessel we see should be emptied and turned over. By this simple act, our entire community can keep the dengue mosquito numbers at low levels, and we'll all have fewer blood-hungry guests in our bedrooms.