

## Deer tick risk smallest on turf

**The nymph of tiny *Ixodes dammini* most abundant in woodlots. Nymphs are responsible for 70 percent of Lyme disease cases.**

by Deborah Smith-Fiola

■ Chances of having a deer tick attach itself to you are measurably less on maintained and mowed lawns than in the woods or around property edges, fences or brush.

That's significant because the deer tick (*Ixodes dammini*) is the vector (carrier) of debilitating Lyme disease, which is most common in some areas of the Northeast, but has been reported in the Midwest also.

Actually, it's an immature stage of the deer tick, its nymph, that's believed to cause 70 percent of all Lyme disease cases. But, it's not so easy to know when the tick is present. While the adult deer tick is the size of a sesame seed, its nymph is about half that size.

When New Jersey researchers wanted to find out just where people are most likely to

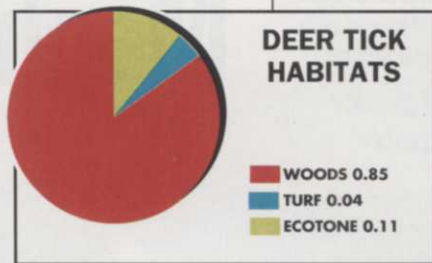
encounter deer tick nymphs they selected 34 residential homesites of 1/2 acre to 1 1/2 acres in Ocean County, New Jersey's Lyme disease hot-spot. They grouped the sites into three specific habitats: the woods, the ecotone (or "edge" of the woods, where the woods meet the lawn), and the turf.

During May and June, they combed the homesites for immature ticks. Late spring is when the nymphs are most active. It's also when people are outdoors a lot.

Of the tick nymphs they found, about 85 percent were in the woods. That's where the immature tick has the greatest chance of finding hosts—mice, birds, rabbits, opossums, raccoons and other small vertebrates.

The ecotone/edge of the woods contained 11 percent of the immature deer ticks.

Turfgrass lawns yielded just 4 percent of the nymphs. They may have ended up in the turf after dropping off an animal host, when fully fed (engorged), where they molt to the nymph stage. Immature deer ticks rarely move more than 10 feet from where they molted, and were mostly found in lawns close to the ecotone (within 4 to 6 feet) if present at all.



Homes with wooded buffers between yards had a large amount of edge habitat, and had a greater number of ticks. Untended borders had more ticks than did landscaped borders. Woodpiles or brushpiles held more ticks nymphs too, probably because there were also more mice there. Mice are a key animal host for immature ticks.

Other studies in New York and Connecticut found 68 percent of deer ticks (all stages) in the woods, 21 percent in the ecotone, and 2 percent in the lawn. Ornamental planting beds yielded 9 percent.

Factors adding to the risk for encountering deer tick nymphs and contracting Lyme disease include: presence of pets (especially dogs), deer paths, birdbaths, woodpiles, brushpiles, bird feeders, and other items or practices which encourage wildlife near the home or encourage people to enter the woods.

Methods of personal protection (repellents, tucking pants into socks) are also necessary in high risk sites. Pesticides labeled for deer tick control can be targeted to high-risk deer tick habitats.

—The author is an entomologist and member of the New Jersey Governor's Council for Lyme Disease.

## Tulsa LCO says clients like their lawn care information on video

by Brad Johnson

■ How many lawn care professionals have the time to sit down with every new customer and explain exactly what we can and cannot do with our service? Usually, we simply leave the expectations of our new customers to chance. That's risky.

What about those customers who don't mow and water properly? Do we just hope that our services will offset their mistakes?

Two years ago we wanted to do something about unrealistic expectations and poor cooperation from customers. But, what really moved us to action was an extensive winterkill in our Tulsa marketplace in 1990. Trying to explain to customers, many of them cancelled customers, why the winterkill was not our fault, led us to produce a customer education video, "Side by Side."

We put the 15-minute video to use during

the 1992 season. It explains:

- What our service can and cannot do.
- Proper mowing and watering practices.
- Insect, disease and weed control.
- Fertilization.
- How customers can help us give them better results.

We've tried written customer education manuals. We've used newsletters, and still do. But, some customers don't read them. Given a choice, it seems, most would rather watch a short video than read.

This past season we used about 450 videos in distributing to over 1,000 of our new customers at our company. We simply left a copy of the video, along with a pre-paid mailer (\$1.05 in postage) in their invoice bag with their initial application.

We also left a survey concerning the video to complete and send back to us. Most customers viewed the video and commented positively.

Also, over 70% of the customers sent the video back after viewing. Many videos were used three, four and five times during the season.

This season we're going to use our video as a marketing tool also. We'll be distributing them with leads in 1993 and allowing our prospects and new customers to just keep the video. We believe this will not only generate more leads with the offer of a free video, but will also lead to a higher closing rate.

Does the video really lead to higher customer retention rates, fewer service problems and, in the end, higher profits? After just one year, we really can't say how much our video affected these areas. But, we're convinced they generated better customer relations and cooperation. Many clients said so.

We also believe that companies who make the effort to educate their customers will be ahead of the competition in the 1990s. Our experience with video suggests it's one of the education/communication tools that works, and is affordable.

—The author is owner of green up! Inc. For more information about video, contact Customer Solutions in Tulsa, Okla.; (800) 779-2196.