



With the weather warming up for another summer down under – the mosquitoes, sandflies, ticks, leeches, sand fleas, no-see-ums, march flies, horse flies, bird lice, stable flies, black flies, gnats, fleas, deer flies, Scottish midges, and *more* can often demoralise even the most seasoned adventurer!

Enjoying yourself in the outdoors always requires a bit of ‘prior preparation to prevent poor performance’. So, I’m sharing my ten tips on how to keep those pesky bugs at bay.

As the saying goes: *if you think you’re too small to have an impact, try going to bed with a mosquito in your tent*. Well, the same applies here: small efforts can have a huge impact!



Enjoying yourself in the outdoors always requires a bit of ‘prior preparation to prevent poor performance’. Credit: Hard Korr

1. Reduce the Appeal

It’s common for bugs to find their victim through scent. To reduce the chance of bugs coming for you, avoid the smelly deodorants, body sprays, creams, ointments, and other scent-inducing products! If the need for a wash arises, consider using a non-scented or naturally-scented soap, such as [the Sea to Summit Wilderness Wash with Citronella](#). This will reduce how much odour you emit, and that alone can halve the number of flying pest attacks!

2. Spray & Cream

Probably the most common defensive strategy when attempting to keep the bugs at bay is the use of repellent spray and/or cream. There are plenty of options on the market, but my personal preference is for those with natural ingredients. These can sometimes be difficult to locate, in which case an option like [Bushman’s](#) is a reliable go-to.

When considering sprays and creams, ensure they have either low or no odour, and include at least 20% DEET (Diethyltoluamide). Furthermore, take notice of how long the product claims to remain effective, what bugs it claims to repel, and whether it’s water- or rub-resistant!

3. Dress for the Occasion

It makes sense, when you think about it... the more skin is exposed, the more there is for bugs to feast on. Even on a warm night, wearing a light windbreaker will reduce bites.

Consider a [Buff](#) to protect your neck and face, or even just a pair of socks to protect your ankles and feet.



Consider a Buff to protect your neck and face. Credit: Buff

4. Candles & Coils

[Candles](#) and [coils](#) have been utilised for years as a barrier for bugs – however, there is a diversity of opinion regarding their effectiveness. In masking the scent produced by humans, they act more as a deterrent than a repellent.



In my experience, much of their effectiveness comes down to the ingredients in the candle or coil, where paraffin wax and 100% natural citronella oil seem to be the most trusted combo. Other factors include the density of candles or coils in the area you're trying to deter the bugs from, and environmental conditions such as wind.

5. Orange Lighting

Now – I'm no scientist, but I know that when considering light at camp, it's the colour output that determines how much it attracts flying insects of all sorts.



A light's colour output determines how much it attracts insects. Credit: Hard Korrr

Bugs generally see three colours of light: ultraviolet (UV), blue, and green. Bright white lights are the most attractive for insects, whereas yellow or orange light (suggestive of sunlight) is less so for most. This explains the increased availability and popularity of yellow and orange camp lighting kits, such as [this one from Hard Korrr](#). The warm lighting provides interchangeable options, setting a nice atmosphere around camp and simultaneously reducing the attraction of bugs!



Yellow or orange light (suggestive of sunlight) is less attractive to most bugs. Credit: Hard Korrr



The warm light sets a nice atmosphere around camp, simultaneously reducing bugs. Credit: Hard Korrr

6. Zappers

In a similar light (excuse the pun), UV light can also be harnessed to attract bugs to low-voltage zappers, stopping them dead in their tracks.

These small, portable, and often rechargeable devices pack a pretty effective punch for their cost. I'm constantly amazed by how powerful and effective zapper lanterns (like [this one](#)) can be! Plus... I reckon there's a sweet joy in hearing that sizzle of death every time it zaps a bug!

7. Bracelets

The jury is out on repellent bracelets. For me, they have never seemed to work – but I've adventured with others who swear by them.

The silicone bands are worn on your wrists and usually chemical-free, which appeals to those who are hesitant to spray aerosols or rub the cream onto their skin. While they are chemical-free, they tend to be a dispensable item given they often only last for 48 hours.

8. Gas-Heated Mats

A lightweight, compact, and shared option for the weight and space-conscious adventurer, these [gas repellents](#) utilise heat to activate a repellent-coated mat that provides over 20



square-metres of protection from bugs. The repellent mats include allethrin, a synthetic extract from the chrysanthemum flower. They last for up to four hours each, and replacement mats are available too.

A 100g Isobutane or Propane gas canister will provide over 90 hours of protection. However, just like candles and coils, it's important to recognise that environmental conditions (such as wind) can reduce their effectiveness.



Thermocell mosquito repellents provide over 20 square-metres of protection from insects.

Credit: Thermocell

9. Campfire Smoke

In locations where campfires are still permitted, smoke is another effective deterrent. When insects smell burning wood or leaves, their instinct is to flee the vicinity to protect themselves from danger (i.e. bushfires). In a sense, your campfire is just another fire to bugs, and that triggers a retreat!

The downside of embracing a campfire to repel insects is the inevitability that someone will always be in the direct line of smoke!



Campfire smoke is another effective deterrent. Credit: Ben Trewren

10. Nets for Beds & Screen Rooms

An option that avoids sprays, creams, smoke, and smells is a screen of some kind. Given that a tent or swag is a stagnant, sealed area of warm air and condensation (*plus* a live food source), it's no wonder insects are desperate to get in!

The most obvious is what you might already have at camp, and keeping the fly-screen zipped up on your tent or swag throughout the day. Many swags and tents feature 'superfine', 'ultrafine', or 'insect-proof' mesh over the windows and doors. This doesn't mean that the shelter is midge proof; in many cases, midges are small enough to invade mosquito- and other insect-proof mesh. Instead, 'sandfly-proof', 'midge-proof', or 'no-see-um' mesh is theoretically designed to be fine enough to restrict midges.

As well as this, the reliability of the zips and taped seams (to close off manufacturing defects like holes) will also help. Another recommendation is to spray the mesh of your tent, swag, or shelter with permethrin (one of the options that cause minimal to no damage to fabrics).

There are other products you can add to your kit, too. The simplest of the more individualised options is a head net. If that doesn't suffice, consider a bed net for one, or a few. To maintain communal space, a screen tent is the best option.

The frustration that comes from these screens, however, is that everyone is confined to a relatively small space – and once somebody gives that up, they risk facing bugs that are no doubt ready to pounce!



Screen tents are the best option for maintaining a communal space. Credit: Oztent



To avoid sprays, creams, smoke, and smells, a screen of some kind also helps to deter insects. Credit: Sea to Summit



We've also discussed this topic on the Snowys Camping Show.

What about you? How have you fought the good fight in seeking peace and refuge from these relentless bugs? Got any tips, tools, or tricks not covered above?