Defeat Outdoor Attacks

Pet owner education is vital to boosting sales of flea and tick treatments for the yard.

BY SANDY CHEBAT

Despite the fact that the vast majority of the flea population is not on the pet itself but is in the environment, sales of outdoor treatments for fleas and ticks in the past decade have declined steadily. The American Pet Products Association's 2015-2016 National Pet Owners Survey reports that the percentage of dog owners who purchased flea and tick products that treat the yard shrunk from 17 percent in 2004 to 9 percent in 2014.

The reason? Insiders cited lack of education.

"Over the years the demand [for yard treatment products] has diminished a bit," said Clint Petree, associate marketing manager/parasitcides at Virbac Corp. in Fort Worth, Texas. "Years ago, there was a big education push to let clients know what they should use to treat the yard and home."

Now, most pet owners do not look into outdoor treatments unless they have a severe flea and tick problem, said Aaron Cohn, manager of Bark 'n Purr Pet Center in Austin, Texas.

However, Neal Wilmore, vice president of commercial operations for Perrigo Animal Health in Omaha, Neb., said "as pet owners continue to become educated about the flea and tick lifecycle and how easily their homes and yards can become infested, we anticipate this category to continue to grow."

Aside from education, the season and the weather greatly influence sales and demand in this category. For example, Mike Tweedy, president and COO of Promika LLC in Cary, N.C., reported steady sales and a little higher demand for the company's flea and tick yard treatment because the increased moisture in the Eastern part of the country brought more vector-borne diseases.

Those pet owners looking for outdoor products specifically seek out safe and natural alternatives, said Darci Petercheff, owner of All American Dog in Somerset, Ky. They want a natural, chemical-free solution that smells good and does not irritate the pet or cause long-term/chronic issues down the road, Petercheff added.

"Customers are demanding safe, natural alternatives to toxic outdoor flea and tick control products," said Stephanie Boone, CEO of Wondercide Natural Products in Austin, Texas, adding that those products must be easy to use and really work.

Barkstown Road LLC, which has two stores in Louisville, Ky., carries "yard sprays where you can attach the product to your hose to evenly cover your entire yard or outdoor space," said owner Kim Boyle, because that's what customers prefer.

Petercheff reported similar inclinations for her customers.

In the realm of natural options, Cohn listed beneficial nematodes, diatomaceous earth and cedar-oil-based sprays as the most-sought-after solutions.

"The balance between cost, safety and efficacy is more in tune with current consumer demands than pyrethrin sprays and other traditional products," he added.
Industry participants agreed that the best way to eliminate—and prevent—a flea and tick infestation is for pet owners to treat their yard and home, in addition to treating their pets. To meet this need, Advantage from Bayer is launching two flea infestation bundles this month: one for cat owners and the other for dog owners, said Jeriel Chua, senior brand manager for Advantage at Bayer Animal Health in Shawnee, Kan. Both bundles include Advantage Yard & Premise Spray.

“Based on our research, we found that shoppers often get confused with the assortment and options at the shelf, especially when managing a flea infestation,” Chua said. “Bayer recognized the need for a comprehensive portfolio of parasite prevention products for home and yard. Our kits provide an assortment of products that can help control an infestation from several fronts, including on the pet, in the pet’s environment and the surrounding yard or patio.”

To meet customer demand for natural products that are easy to use, in April, Wondercide Natural Products debuted Ready to

Use Natural Flea & Tick Control for Yard + Garden, a ready-to-use version of the company’s yard concentrate.

“Wondercide’s original Flea & Tick Control for Yard + Garden concentrate requires an external applicator and mixing before use,” said CEO Stephanie Boone. “As customers continue to seek out simpler solutions, Wondercide modified the product to meet market demand. With our new ready-to-use version, you simply attach a hose and spray your lawn. Yard + Garden kills the entire lifecycle of fleas, ticks, mosquitoes and other pests.”

Also in April, Promika LLC released ShieldTec Yard & Premise Spray to round out its portfolio and to enable owners to protect pets while outdoors. Efficacy and easy use were key focuses for the new offering, said Mike Tweedy, president and COO of the Cary, N.C., company.

“We’ve tried to pick the most effective active ingredient and most widely used one in market that is effective outdoor paired with easy-to-use application for the consumer,” Tweedy said.