

So, you have scorpions on the rise

Written by T. Rob Brown (aka Roberto Chocolate)

Tuesday, 04 January 2011 21:30 - Last Updated Tuesday, 04 January 2011 21:40

No - this is not an astrological dilemma, or a bad pick-up line in a bar. It is the reality of living in a tropical environment - yet another lovely part of living in paradise that the real estate brochures won't tell you.

Here is an excellent article on how to deal with these annoying (but not deadly) pests in Panama, courtesy of Eric Jackson, Editor www.thepanamanews.com . Thanks, Eric. Roberto

So, it fights scorpion-style --- then it must die!

by Eric Jackson

So, you have scorpions in the house. The good news is that in Panama all scorpion species will give you an unpleasant sting but mostly their venom is not life-threatening to most people.

We have 16 scorpion species (some of which are arguably subspecies) here, some of them found only in small local ranges. The caveat is that some people can die from a reaction to a single bee sting, and that especially vulnerable people, like infants or those already in frail health, are, well, especially vulnerable.

If you or someone in your household is stung by a scorpion, first aid is with an antihistamine (benadryl) and an analgesic (acetaminophen) -- single doses of each --- and by washing out the wound with cool tapwater and then putting ice on it for a couple of hours.

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There are antihistamine, corticosteroid, and analgesic ointments that help when applied to the wound. Squeezing some of the venom out of the wound can have certain benefits, but the next morning the bruising and swelling is likely to be worse.

The danger signs, and one of which indicates immediate emergency room treatment, are muscle spasms, hyperventilation, a racing pulse or heart beat, dizziness or disorientation and anaphylactic shock. If your infant or your 80-something mother is stung, get her to the hospital at once.

It helps if you have killed the scorpion and can take it along to be identified.

Depending on the surroundings of where you live there are various pesticide strategies, none of them all that wonderful but some of which will reduce their numbers for awhile. As in not only fumigating your house, but laying down a pesticide ring encircling it, or more than one such ring, using bifenthrin powder.

There are also cyfluthrin, benzeneacetate, cypermethrin and deltamethrin sprays. But one limiting factor is that scorpions don't groom themselves like most other arthropods, so walking through a pesticide-laced environment is not so deadly to them as it is to other invertebrates. Plus, these wash away in the tropical humidity.

Plus, if you poison your environment you also poison yourself, at least a little. It becomes a special concern if there are babies in the household. (Dogs and cats? The pesticides are not good for them, and many of them just love to terrorize scorpions.)

Before you think in terms of things toxic, you should think about habitat. As in:

Remove all scorpion habitats --- trash, stones, bricks, broken-up walkways, logs, boards, and so on --- from around the house.

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Keep the grass cut short. Prune bushes so that they don't touch the house. Don't let tree branches overhang the house.

Keep garbage cans in a rack that keeps them a few inches off the ground.

Install weather strips around loose-fitting doors and windows.

Plug holes, cracks or crevices in exterior walls by caulking them or if they are necessary for air and moisture to get in and out by putting steel wool, or bits of nylon scouring pads into the gaps.

Caulk around eaves, pipes and any other cracks in the exterior of the house. Do the same with all similar openings inside the house.

Keep door and window screens in good repair and tightly fitted to their frames.

At night scorpions glow under ultraviolet light so can be hunted with a UV light. But don't be an idiot and try to pick them up with your hands, or stomp on them while wearing flip-flops. A pair of tongs or a can of bug spray are the weapons of choice.

Scorpions are like mice in that they like to walk along walls, in hidden places. So a glue pad between the back of the refrigerator and the wall, or between the hamper and the wall in the bathroom (or so on) will catch some of them.

Putting boric acid out in such places will also kill them like it does cockroaches, if they walk through it. Diatomaceous earth works when used as described with boric acid. Putting a damp burlap bag on the floor overnight will often attract scorpions to be stepped on in the morning.

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