

Plants Mosquitos DO NOT Like

Adapted from HGTV.com by Sheri Bethard Texas Certified Master Gardener

Plants act as short-term repellents and used strategically can help deter mosquitoes. Learn what you need to know to make the most of mosquito-repelling plants.

Marigolds

Cheerful and bright, marigolds make an easy-to-grow addition to any garden plan—in pots or planting beds. These perky annuals bring terrific color all season long. What you might not know is that marigolds pack a punch to many insects, including mosquitoes, thanks to chemical insecticides they release. That's why marigolds have such a strong odor when you touch them. Both flowers and leaves release the chemicals, but blossoms deliver the strongest punch. Other insects that marigolds deter include aphid, whitefly, thrips, tomato hornworm, Mexican bean beetle and squash bug. Tuck marigolds into pots on the patio to make summer evenings less buggy. Or use them in the vegetable garden to help repel pests.

Bee Balm

Beloved for its ability to beckon bees, butterflies and hummingbirds, bee balm (*Monarda*) also earns rave reviews for its mosquito-repelling qualities. For many insect-detering plants to work, you have to crush leaves or blooms to release the plant's volatile oils. Bee balm is an exception to that rule. As it grows and blooms in your garden, it releases fragrances mosquitoes dislike (so does basil, by the way). Bee balm is a perennial that flowers in a variety of colors and plant sizes.

Sage

Look to herbs like sage to give mosquitoes the brush-off. Use sage fresh by crushing leaves and rubbing on your skin or clothing. Or tie a bundle of sage stems (fresh or dried) and toss them into your firepit or chiminea to create a cloud of mosquito-repelling smoke. No firepit? Light one end of a sage bunch and let it smolder on a fire-resistant tray. Other herbs that work the same way to repel skeeters include rosemary and thyme.

Variegated Plectranthus

If you've ever grown variegated plectranthus, you know how smelly this plant is. Just brush it gently or splash water onto leaves, and the odor is released. That odor is what helps repel mosquitoes—and a host of other insects. This plant goes by many names, including Madagascar spur flower, Swedish ivy and mintleaf. Botanically, look for *Plectranthus madagascariensis* 'Marginatus'—or just ask for variegated plectranthus. You'll know you have the right one by the felted leaves with the strong odor.

Scented Geranium

Few plants offer as much sensory appeal as scented geraniums. The group includes a wide variety of foliage forms and plant sizes. Flowers tend to be smaller than traditional bedding plant geraniums. When crushed or rubbed, scented geranium leaves release their volatile oils. Fragrances include citrus blends, rose, peppermint, nutmeg, apple and cinnamon. The lemon-scented varieties seem to possess the strongest skeeter-repelling characteristics. Scented geraniums make beautiful container plants. In cold zones, move plants indoors for winter or root cuttings to keep plants alive until spring.

Catmint

Catnip essential oil has been scientifically proven to repel mosquitoes 10 times more effectively than DEET. Catmint is the ornamental cousin of catnip, unfurling scented leaves and beautiful flowers. Less attractive to cats than catnip, catmint also possesses mosquito-repelling qualities. It's a perennial in Zones 4 to 9. Plant it near outdoor seating areas and entry doors to help repel mosquitoes. This pretty variety is *Nepeta faassenii* 'Puursian Blue'.

Mint

Mint is a workhorse in the garden when it comes to giving insects the brush off. To release the strong mint oils in leaves, brush against plants or crush leaves and rub on skin or clothing. Try tucking lightly bruised leaves (still attached to stems) into pockets or bouquets on your porch or patio to confuse and repel mosquitoes. You can also use any mint, including Pineapple, spearmint, lemon mint or peppermint. Mints spread aggressively in the garden. Always plant it in containers, even in beds; keeping the edge of pots elevated at least an inch above soil. When mint flowers, the blooms attract beneficial insects, including ones that sting, like wasps. If you don't want these insects near seating areas, keep plants trimmed so blooms don't form.

Thyme

Thyme, including red creeping thyme possesses excellent mosquito-repelling properties. The secret is to crush the leaves to release the volatile oils. You can simply place crushed stems around outdoor seating areas or rub the leaves on skin or clothing. Burning thyme leaves also shows skeeters the door, providing 85 to 90 percent protection for up to 90 minutes. Lemon thyme, silver thyme, English thyme, and creeping thyme—all types offer some degree of mosquito protection. Tuck them into pots, or use them to edge planting beds.