How does an infestation start in a home?

A dog brings in one or more adult ticks from outdoors. Following a blood meal, a female tick drops off and oviposits up to 5,000 eggs in a single mass. The larvae that emerge immediately seek shelter in cracks or crevices such as baseboards or furniture, but also commonly move en masse up walls and congregate in the corners of ceilings. These larvae eventually find the dog and receive their first blood meal. The larvae go largely unnoticed because they are about the size of a pencil tip.

The larvae then drop off into the surrounding area, molt to the nymphal stage, and again seek the dog for a second blood meal. At this point owners occasionally notice the ticks, but they usually go unnoticed.

After they molt to the adult stage, the ticks find the dog for a third and final blood meal. Ticks are noticed at this stage for two reasons: 1) Adult females engorge to the size of a raisin and are often located on or near the dog's head, or 2) adults are seen crawling on floors actively looking for the dog. This "predatory" behavior is somewhat unique to ticks.

Typically, residents do not notice these ticks until they have completed a full generation. Often, overlapping generations of ticks occur in homes, so tick numbers can quickly multiply into the thousands.

How can I prevent an infestation?

Regular inspection of your dog and its resting areas are key to tick prevention. Mechanically remove ticks from your dog: Use tweezers to grasp as closely as possible to the dog’s skin and around the mouthparts of the tick, and pull the tick straight out. This can be difficult.

The earlier you can catch an introduction of ticks into your home, the easier it will be to implement a control program. Here’s why: By movement of the dog or the ticks themselves, BDT can be distributed throughout the home and yard. Ticks may end up anywhere the dog has access, including beds, cars, couches and kitchens, just to name a few.

How can I control an infestation?

On-pet interventions. Resistance to permethrin has been found, which means that products will no longer kill ticks effectively. Owners should consult with veterinarians for alternative on-animal treatments.
Homeowner checklist

We recommend the following Integrated Pest Management approach for BDT, ideally to be done on the same day. Expect to repeat this process several times to achieve maximum tick control and prevention:

**Pets**

1. Inspect pets as they enter the home.
2. Do additional on-pet interventions as needed and recommended by your veterinarian.
3. Do a daily “tick check” and removal.

**Inspect and clean pet resting areas**

1. Indoor tick management can be achieved by steam cleaning upholstery, cracks, and crevices where ticks may hide. Be careful about the surfaces that you choose to steam clean, as the steam can damage some surfaces.
2. Consider using a detergent to clean pet resting areas on surfaces that can be washed in this manner.

**Remove potential tick harborages**

1. Cut back shrubs as far as possible.
2. Keep grass cut as low as possible.

**Insecticidal treatments**

1. Call a professional.
2. Use products according to the label.
   a. Understand that outdoor broadcast treatments will not last long in our southern sun and summer rains.
3. Rotate classes of insecticide to delay the onset of insecticide resistance.

A factor complicating BDT management is the ability of this tick to survive without a host for several months during each of its three life stages, thereby negating the “wait-it-out” strategy of starvation by absence of hosts. An unfortunate side effect occurs when the dog is considered the culprit of the infestation and is removed from the home: The tick can complete its life cycle on rodents. Furthermore, when dogs are not present, ticks use humans as hosts.

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More than just a pet peeve

The brown dog tick (BDT) can be a serious pest in homes with pets, but there are several things that homeowners can do to prevent and control ticks at home. Homeowner cooperation greatly improves the effects of professional chemical control treatments that may be used in the fight against ticks.

Understanding brown dog ticks

Ticks are not insects; they are more closely related to spiders and mites. Pet dogs are the usual tick host. The brown dog tick is an “obligate three-host tick.” This means that larva, nymph and adult ticks must acquire a blood meal from the dog before proceeding to the next developmental stage. One female tick carrying eggs into your home can result in 5,000 more ticks if left unchecked.

The brown dog tick is the only tick that can successfully complete its life cycle inside a home, particularly in the southeastern United States. This makes BDT a concern not only for dogs, but for people as well.