

Our next get together will be:

Saturday, August 15, 10:00 a.m. – 2 p.m.

**Annual Mike Utt Memorial River Cleanup and Scioto River Day
Scioto Park**

Join us once again to honor Mike Utt as we make our river more healthy and beautiful.

It didn't seem so long ago that we were sitting under the cold grey skies of winter wishing for a summer day. Well, here we are in the midst of warm breezes and nightly fireflies. Although I fully enjoy summer, there's one thing that causes deep feelings of dread to rise up; that is chiggers. Because I have suffered from huge welts, sleepless nights of itching, and doctor's needles, I fear them and at times the thought of walking through tall grass provokes an unsettled feeling. I didn't realize how fearful I was until doing research in northern Maine. While walking nervously through a tall grassy area, I inquired about this little mite. My professor commented that we were "too far north for chiggers". I wanted to run and suddenly felt like a caged bird set free. Chiggers like warmer areas and can live year round in the south. They're most abundant during July and August in Ohio.

This tiny invertebrate is often called an insect and it does have six legs in its larval form. However, chiggers are related to spiders and ticks and have 8 legs as adults. It's the generally microscopic, immature stage that host on most vertebrates with the exception of fish. They make their way to their host by climbing to the top of tall grasses or other plants and waiting. When a host walks by they just climb aboard. They do not sting, suck blood, or burrow into the skin. They inject enzymes that digest skin cells and as they eat the cells, our body responds by creating secretions that harden. That's why you can sometimes feel a hard center to a chigger bite. By the way, I feel very itchy as I write!

So what good is a chigger? I've often shared that my twenty plus years of studying the natural world has allowed me to see an amazing interconnectedness. However, typically it's the large, pretty animals and plants that are studied and the tiny, seemingly "icky" things get overlooked. Because of this, I didn't expect to find anything when looking for studies of the chigger family, *Trombidulidae*. As it turns out, there were countless studies on mites and chiggers around the world. There's a ton of information, but basically I found that some types of adult chiggers help keep other insect populations in check. As predators, they are important. Ah, this is good to know. I don't need to have a reason for things to "be", but it does make my job easier if I can explain how something fits or has a purpose.

So is there any way to avoid chiggers? Well, yes and it's the same as with other insects. You can use chemicals or dress in long sleeves and pants with your cuffs tucked into your socks. However, chiggers can get through cloth if it's loosely woven. You can also avoid tall grassy areas. But, if you're like me and can't resist ripe raspberries then you might be out of luck.

If you do get chigger bites the best thing to do is avoid scratching them. They'll go away more quickly. You'll hear numerous remedies including painting the bites with Clorox or

fingernail polish. I don't recommend either. Stick with good old over the counter anti itch creams!

Chiggers a tiny drop in my summer bucket and one that I easily put up with to enjoy the long, warm days. I hope your summer days are enjoyable.

All my best,

Míme