

# Safe Bug Sprays for Summer

It's probably not a shock that products containing DEET, are not on our recommended list. **DEET** (N,N-diethyl-meta-toluamide) is a widely used active ingredient in insect repellents. Biting insects are attracted to the scent of carbon dioxide gas to find food... in this case, your blood. Skin and breath naturally give off carbon dioxide. DEET masks the scent of carbon dioxide therefore keeping buggies away.

HOWEVER... DEET can act as an irritant, and has been reported to be the cause of seizures, insomnia, mood disturbances and impaired cognitive function. The American Academy of Pediatrics still stands by its safety on children over 2 months old. A brief encounter with DEET might not cause any harm, but [long term exposure may](#). DEET is certainly effective but if DEET gives you the heebies then there are natural alternatives that work just as well to mask carbon dioxide and keep those pests away.

The main ingredients in natural bug repellents rely on oils, most notably citronella, soybean oil, geraniol (oil of geranium), eucalyptus, cedar, rosemary, eucalyptus and sometimes lemon oil. I've scoured the stores and the Internet for some better choices and here is what I came up with.

**SafeMama Criteria:** Products had to be free of DEET, parabens, phthalates, PEG's, Sulfates, Dioxanes, Propylene Glycols, and synthetic fragrances. We have tested a handful of these products and they do work for general kid and adult use. (*Note: I went ahead and included any [Skin Deep](#) ratings that were available. However, some haven't been reviewed for accuracy since 2006.*)

## Sprays & Lotions

[California Baby® Natural Bug Blend™ Bug Repellent Spray](#), [California Baby® Citronella Summer Lotion](#). **Main Ingredients:** Citronella, lemongrass and cedar essential oils. **Kathy Says:** These both work well and don't smell too strong. I prefer the spray, it's easier than applying lotions. They are both gentle and haven't caused any reactions. However these are both hard to find in stores at the moment. **Skin Deep Rating:** N/A

[Burt's Bees Herbal Insect Repellent](#). **Main Ingredients:** Soybean Oil, Rosemary Oil, Lemongrass Oil, Cedar Oil. **Kathy Says:** This works better than most I have tried. It smells great too. The only drawback is that the "spray" is not really a spray at all. It comes out in oil form and you have to rub it all over the place to get good coverage. But again, works really well at

keeping away bites. **Skin Deep Rating:** 0

[Bite Blocker® Herbal Spray](#) Bite Blocker® Herbal Lotion □ **Main**

**Ingredients:** Soybean Oil. **Kathy Says:** This brand also comes in a lotion and wipes, both of which pass our SafeMama criteria. However we haven't yet had a chance to test them out. Check out their [website](#) for effectiveness information. I will be reviewing these in the coming weeks and will update accordingly. **Skin Deep Rating:** 2

[Jason Quit Bugging Me - Natural Insect Repellent Spray](#) **Main Ingredients:** Soy Bean Oil, Geranium **Kathy Says:** This comes in a great little spray bottle and goes on evenly. But be careful not to get in the eyes (like all of them), I just caution it here because it tends to mist when sprayed and I've gotten it in my own eyes trying to cover my kid. This works pretty well, not as well as others though. The smell is not my favorite either. My mother commented it smelled like wet gym socks. I do like how it sprays on and doesn't sit on skin like an oil. **Skin Deep Rating:** N/A

[Buzz Away Extreme™ Natural Insect Repellent](#) **Main Ingredients:** Soybean Oil, Geranium Oil, Castor Oil, Cedarwood Oil, Citronella Oil, Peppermint Oil, Lemongrass Oil **Kathy Says:** This stuff I do like, comes in a great spray. It sprays on a little oily. This stuff claims 8 hour protection but my son still got bit wearing it after an hour or so, so I don't know if 8 hours is an accurate assumption. I'd still reapply every few hours to be covered. The towelettes are cool but for \$8+ you only get 12. Compared to Bite Blocker Wipes, which is about the same price you get 25. **Skin Deep Rating:** 0 - 1 (there are two listings)

[Aubrey Organic's Gone! Safe and Natural Outdoor Spray SPF 10 4oz\\*](#) **Main Ingredients:** Padimate O (PABA Ester), Natural Grain Alcohol, Vegetable Glycerin, Organic Soybean Oil **Kathy Says:** If this wasn't made by Aubrey Organics I might be more skeptical. I'm including this because they take great care to provide safe sun and outdoor protection. But they use PABA which some people avoid. **Skin Deep Rating:** 7 (Due to the PABA content this rates pretty high.. interesting)

## Wipes

[Bite Blocker® Herbal Wipes](#) **Main Ingredients:** Soybean Oil **Kathy Says:** This brand also comes in a lotion and spray, both of which pass our

SafeMama criteria. However we haven't yet had a chance to test them out. Check out their [website](#) for effectiveness information. I will be reviewing these in the coming weeks and will update accordingly. **Skin Deep Rating:** N/A

[Buzz Away Insect Repellent Towelettes](#) **Main Ingredients:** Soybean Oil, Geranium Oil, Castor Oil, Cedarwood Oil, Citronella Oil, Peppermint Oil, Lemongrass Oil **Kathy Says:** The towelettes are nice, and work well but for \$8+ you only get 12. Compared to Bit Blocker Wipes, which is about the same price you get 25. **Skin Deep Rating:** 0 - 1 (there are two listings)

## Non-Spray Repellents

[DEET Free Bug Band](#) **Main Ingredients:** Geranium Oil, Polypropylene plastic band **Kathy Says:** This wristband is great for kids and can be stored for future use. Geraniol is a great natural repellent. People with perfume allergies may have trouble with this one since its about 20% Geraniol. But if you have a perfume allergy you may have problems with any natural repellent since they rely heavily on scents. **NOTE:** *This company makes wipes and a spray as well, but I didn't include them due to them containing Sodium Laureth Sulfates in the ingredients.*

[Don't Bite Me Patch](#) **Main Ingredients:** Vitamin B1 **Kathy Says:** Unlike the other repellents, this patch uses Vitamin B1 instead of fragrant oils. B1 when excreted from the skin will mask the scent of carbon dioxide (which is what the bugs are attracted to). By applying the patch to the skin directly, rather than taking a vitamin, is the faster absorption. Like lotions (which is why we are so adamant about safe skin care), things applied to the skin go directly into your bloodstream instead of having to travel the digestive system first. So this will take effect quicker. I am not a huge fan of having something stuck to my or my kids skin (seems like it would be an irritant) but the materials.

The patch itself is made of "Acrylic Pressure Sensitive Adhesive with Aloe and Thiamine Hydrochloride on Urethane film laminated to polyethylene coated kraft paper". I can't find any solid reason to not use this product (or the wristbands for that matter) other than the waste factor, as they may not be recyclable.

**To sum up:** This obviously isn't every single natural product on the planet, but I also had to eliminate several natural ones from our lists due to questionable ingredients. We're comfortable recommending these, but of

course, as with anything you put on your skin, use your judgment, follow the directions. Everything in moderation!

Other natural tips for deterring buggies naturally at home:

- Eliminate standing water from outdoor areas where you hang out and play.
- Keep potted rosemary or eucalyptus plants around your patio areas
- Eat food rich in B Vitamins like bananas or eat garlicky food - mosquitoes don't like it apparently

If you do get bit, I like [Burt's Bees Res-Q ointment](#), comes in a little solid tin. A little dab on a bug bite takes away the itchies. Works great on bumps, scrapes and bruises too.

Enjoy the outdoors! Remember to also choose a safe sunscreen for sunny days! Read our [Safer Sunscreen Showdown](#) report for our top sunblock picks.

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- [Fragrance Education is Skin Deep](#)