

## Tick

**Scientific Name:** *Amblyomma americanum* (Linnaeus)

**Order:** Acari



**Lone star tick,**  
*Amblyomma americanum* (Linnaeus)  
(Acari: Ixodidae).  
Photo by Jackman.

**cription:** Adult ticks have eight legs and the body is fused into a single region. Lone star tick adults are brown to tan, 1/3 inch long before feeding and up to 1/2-inch long engorged. Females have a single silvery-white spot on its back while males have scattered spots or streaks around the margins of the body.

Other "wood ticks" include several other *Amblyomma* species, the **American dog tick**, *Dermacentor variabilis* (Say) and the **brown dog tick**, *Rhipicephalus sanguineus* (Latreille). Ticks can belong to either of two family groups: "hard ticks" (Ixodidae) and "soft ticks" (Argasidae).

**Life Cycle:** Ticks develop through four stages: egg; six-legged larva or "seed ticks"; an eight-legged nymph; and adult. Tick species like the lone star tick are referred to as three-host ticks because they utilize different hosts for each feeding stage. Females occur in late spring and early summer. After feeding, they drop from the host and lay clusters of thousands of eggs in ground litter. Males die soon after mating with one or more females and females die soon after laying eggs. There may be overlapping generations, with peak adult and nymphal activity occurring from March through May and again from July through August. Larvae occur in mid-June or July. It often takes up to 3 years for a tick like the lone star tick to complete its life cycle.

**Habitat, Food Source(s), Damage:** Mouthparts are for piercing and sucking. Ticks feed by making a small incision in the skin with their barbed, piercing mouthparts (chelicerae). After inserting their mouthparts they set the barbed teeth on the anchoring device (hypostome) and secrete a fluid that cements their mouthparts

into the skin. Lone star ticks live in wooded areas with underbrush, along creeks and rivers near animal resting places. This three-host tick tends to have a serial host preference: *e.g.*, larval and nymphal stages feed on the blood of separate small wild animals, birds or rodents, while adults feed on larger animals, including livestock and deer. All three stages will feed on humans.

**Pest Status:** Also known as the "wood tick;" one of a number of tick species in Texas. All ticks feed on warm-blooded animals by attaching themselves to the skin using their mouthparts. Tick "bites" can be painful and cause localized inflammation, swelling, loss of blood (anemia), open hosts to secondary infections and possibly transmit disease agents such as those causing Rocky Mountain spotted fever, Lyme disease and tularemia. The bite of a tick is not initially felt. If the tick attaches near the back of the neck and feeds there a while, injecting salivary secretions, the vertebrate victim may suffer from "tick paralysis", which may result in total paralysis and death unless the tick is removed.

For additional information, contact your local Texas Cooperative Extension agent or search for other state Extension offices.

Literature: Ebeling 1978; Hair & Bowman 1986; Hamman 1983; McDaniel 1979; Teel 1985.