



## PRODUCT REVIEW

by Todd Carlson

# The Curse of the Mosquito

It's not easy being an amateur astronomer in Canada. When we aren't coping with subzero temperatures over the winter months, we are forced to deal with these annoying observing companions during the spring and summer.

SOME PARTS OF THE COUNTRY HAVE it worse than others. Where I live, in the Muskoka region of central Ontario, the mosquitoes can be so thick, you dare not venture outdoors between May and July without a jacket specifically designed for protection from the pests or without wearing bug repellent.

Although blackflies retreat as darkness falls, mosquitoes linger. But slathering on

bug repellent for an observing session is not a wise choice, because the chemicals in sprays and lotions can eat away at optical coatings. You don't want to be handling expensive eyepieces or touching the optics of a telescope or—especially—handling binoculars if you are wearing any sort of chemical repellent.

Fortunately, other options do exist.



A thin mesh jacket and hood eliminate the need for repellents, with their destructive properties. However, astronomical viewing through a mesh screen along with having to wear gloves in summer make this a less than ideal solution.

Volunteering to sacrifice myself for *SkyNews* readers this spring, I purchased several different mosquito repellents for testing, with the criteria that they *not* be sprays or lotions and that they cost less than \$40. Although other products exist, such as a propane fogger, they were not included in this test because they exceeded the price criteria.

Testing conditions were completed on an evening with low winds and very high (ouch . . . whap!) mosquito activity. Here are the results. ■

*Assistant editor Todd Carlson valiantly suggested this test. We didn't ask him to make the sacrifice, but he did suffer!*



### THE BEST

**Thermacell**  
(\$36.99)

About the size of a cordless telephone, the Thermacell consists of a small fuel pack and heating pad. Simply insert the pad and fuel pack, click the starter, and wait 30 minutes for it to become effective. With a range of about 12-by-12 feet, the Thermacell didn't completely eradicate all mosquitoes, but it did reduce them to a very acceptable level. A thick wall of mosquitoes was literally flying at the edge of the Thermacell's effective range. A relatively new product, the Thermacell is available at some hardware stores and outdoor sporting-goods stores.



### GOOD PERFORMANCE

**OFF Mosquito Lamp** (\$15.99);  
**OFF Citronella Candle** (\$6.99)

Both worked fairly well, though neither had the same effective range as the Thermacell. The flame could be potentially dangerous (and unacceptable for astronomers who require complete darkness).



### SUBSTANDARD PERFORMANCE

**Malibu Mosquito Inhibitor** (\$19.99)

This device, which uses a small bowl with a spongelike substance that smells like citronella, reduced the number of mosquitoes by only about 50 percent.



### COMPLETE FAILURES

**No Bugs Sonic Mosquito Repeller;**  
**Lentek Bite Shield**

The No Bugs Sonic Mosquito Repeller emits a high-pitched frequency via a small device that hangs like a key chain from your belt or jacket. It had very little effect. The Lentek Bite Shield gives off a citronellalike fragrance but had little to no effect on the mosquitoes.