

PICARIDIN BEATS DEET FOR SUMMER HIKING

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Bugs and ticks drive me insane. There are natural bug and tick sprays, but during the summer season, it can seem like the bugs are laughing at natural repellents.

By late spring and summer in the Catskills, bugs and ticks can get pretty aggressive, especially on wooded trails, slower climbs, stream crossings, and shaded sections where the air gets humid and still. A good bug repellent can completely change how comfortable a hike feels over the course of the day, especially during long mileage hikes and warmer weekends.

One of the products I've been using more during summer hiking season is picaridin, a light-weight easy to apply spray whose chemical makeup is engineered to mimic the natural compound in black pepper that gives it its spicy flavor. Picaridin is an active ingredient found in bug repellents like *OFF!*. Look for this ingredient when choosing your bug and tick sprays before your hike.

Because it mimics a natural compound, picaridin is an easy, safe, and effective alternative to DEET-based bug repellents for summer hiking conditions (Ghali & Albers, 2024).

DEET can be scary. A friend of mine on the SAR team said DEET melted part of his helmet. Some bug sprays contain a lot of DEET, but picaridin contains none.

In addition to its protective qualities, I also find that compared to DEET, picaridin feels lighter on my skin, has a milder scent, and is less noticeable during humid weather in the Northeast.

For summer hiking in the Catskills, picaridin works especially well in the following situations:

- Wooded trails with heavier mosquito and tick activity
- Humid sections with slower airflow
- Stream crossings and mud
- Early morning and evening trail conditions
- Longer hikes

I like how easy it is to integrate picaridin into normal hiking prep. A quick application before the hike and a small bottle in the daypack usually covers most day hikes throughout the summer season. Many bug sprays containing picaridin provide 12-14 hour protection, sufficient for average and above-average length hikes. If I'm hiking longer than that, I normally reapply to be safe.



Small details like this don't seem important until you're deep into a humid summer hike with bugs fully active and miles still ahead. In the Catskills, a little preparation goes a long way toward keeping the focus where it should be—on the trail, not what's biting you on it.

NOTE: If you're driving toward the Catskills for the weekend, please consider buying repellent products and other hiking necessities at the several local outdoor stores and outfitters en route to the trailheads. Supporting local shops helps keep outdoor communities active and trails maintained, and many of the people working there are hikers themselves with a wealth of knowledge.