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# Profile

## Tick Doc

**Deer ticks are out for blood. Humans won't tuck their pants into their socks. For Dr. Thomas Mather, this means war.**

A tick is the ninja of insects: Silently, it sinks its long, barbed mouth into your skin and releases its saliva, a liquid arsenal of blood-stealing weapons—there's glue to keep the tick attached, anticoagulants to keep things flowing, pain killers so you'll never feel a thing.

Dr. Tom Mather knows what he's up against. The director of URI's Center for Vector-Borne Disease has been studying ticks since 1983, establishing the Tick Encounter Resource Center four years ago to fight the spread of Lyme and other tick-borne illnesses, which infect more than a thousand Rhode Islanders each year. It's easy enough to protect ourselves—there's even an acronym to help: T for tweezers (as in own them), I for inspect yourself, C for clothing repellent and K for kill ticks in your yard and on pets. Yet most of us don't do it.

Mather is on a mission to make it even easier. He recently convinced **Insect Shield**, which makes repellent gear and apparel for such retailers as L.L. Bean and R.E.I., to create an affordable line of their permethrin-treated clothing for kids and, he hopes soon, adults. "People don't tuck their pant legs into their socks, so why keep saying it?" asks Mather. "Repellent clothes are a no-brainer. I want to make it so that every family can afford them."

He also wants to make prevention awareness fun. When he isn't focused on his tick vaccination program, teaching and research at URI, Mather has been pushing for an instant lottery game ("Scratch the Tick") and will host the annual Tick Awareness Day gala, serving his signature "tick-tini," on June 5. He also leads interactive workshops for kids and adults. "My goal is to get ticks on people's radar and make it fun to take action."

Surely, we can't be more stubborn than a blood-sucking insect. *Learn to protect yourself at [tickencounter.org](http://tickencounter.org).* —N.M.

Never surrender: Mather uses a white tick flag to collect specimens.

PHOTO: RON COWIE