Flies in and Around the Home

House Flies

House flies are the most common fly found in and around homes. The adults are not large, 1/8-1/4” long, and dull gray. The larvae or maggots, are 1/4-3/8” long when mature. They are whitish, eyeless, legless and taper towards the front. Female flies lay eggs (<1/16” long) singly or in clusters of 20-50 (350-900/lifetime) in moist material like garbage. The larvae hatch in 8-20 hours. Maggots feed for 3-7 days. They then crawl, up to 150 feet, to cool dry areas to pupate. Pupation, the resting stage where maggots change into adults takes 3-4 days.

Food varies from excrement to human food. Adults feed only on liquid food and can mechanically transmit many disease pathogens. Female flies will seek out any warm, moist material that has sufficient food for larval development. In daylight hours, flies tend to rest less than 5 feet from the ground on walls, floors, etc. At night, they tend to rest above 5 feet near their daytime food sources.

Control: Locate larval breeding sites and eliminate them. This includes timely removal of trash and keeping garbage cans dry and as clean as possible. Use cans with tight fitting lids. To prevent adults from entering homes, tighten screens, windows and doors. Seal all holes and entry points. Make sure all vents are tightly screened. Adult flies can be trapped with baited fly traps or sticky fly tape. Spraying is generally not effective inside the home.

Cluster Flies and Attic Flies

Cluster flies resemble large house flies and may suddenly appear indoors around windows or lamps in the fall, spring or winter. They often become active on warm, sunny, winter days or when heat in the home arouses them. Cluster flies are 3/8” long, dark gray, and non-metallic. They are sluggish flies. These flies are not garbage or manure related. The larvae are actually parasites of earthworms. Adult flies will enter homes in late August to overwinter and occupy attics and/or wall voids that are warmed by winter sun exposure (most often southern). Other attic flies also resemble house flies but are large.

Control: Prevention is the best control. In summer, seal up access openings. Place tight screens over vents. Caulk or seal cracks and holes. Inside the home, swat or vacuum any flies that appear.

Fruit Flies / Vinegar Flies

Fruit or vinegar flies are primarily pests in the kitchen area of the home. They are small (1/8”), dull tan to brownish yellow or brownish black. Their eyes are usually bright red. The larvae are whitish, 1/4” long, eyeless, legless, and taper to-
wards the head. They are seldom seen. The adult flies are attracted to over ripe fruits, vegetables and fermenting foods. They are attracted to this fermenting odor, and the immatures feed on the yeast developing in the fruit. Food sources include: bananas, grapes, peaches, pineapples, tomatoes, potatoes, etc. and fermenting liquids such as beer, cider, vinegar and wine. The female fly lays eggs on the surface of the food or fermenting liquid. Larvae develop primarily in liquids, near the surface. When mature (5-6 days) they crawl to drier areas to pupate. The entire life cycle takes 8-10 days.

**Control:** The primary control is sanitation. Eliminate larval food and development sites. Keep fruit stored in the refrigerator. Rinse and drain bottles and cans that are to be recycled. Squeeze out mops thoroughly and dry. There may be enough food and moisture to complete development on the damp mops.

**Blow Flies, Greenbottle, and Bluebottle Flies**

These flies are similar in size to house flies, but are metallic blue or green. These flies may breed in dead animals, feces and/or garbage depending on the species. If a large number of these flies are found in the house, they are usually breeding in the home or in the immediate area. Examples of breeding sites may be a dead mouse or squirrel in the attic, or a dead bird in the chimney. The green bottle flies may be commonly seen on pet feces outdoors.

**Control:** The life cycle is very short (2-4 weeks). So, as with the house flies, it is important to locate and eliminate the larval breeding site. This may involve timely removal of pet waste from the yard, locating a dead animal or cleaning up garbage cans. Adult control is the same as for house flies.

**Flesh Flies**

Flesh flies are 2 to 3 times larger than house flies (over 1/3"), gray with 3 dark stripes on the body, a gray and black checkerboard pattern on the abdomen, and red eyes. Most species of flesh flies are scavengers and may breed in garbage, manure or animal carcasses. A few species are parasites of caterpillars. Flesh flies are common in populated areas but seldom enter houses in large numbers. If flesh flies become a nuisance, control is the same as for blow and bottle flies.
Miscellaneous Small Flies

Phorid Fly

There are several species of small black flies that may occasionally become pests in buildings. They may include Phorid flies which breed in decaying organic matter of plant or animal origin, and March flies which breed in decaying organic matter. Extremely large numbers of Phorid flies on the first floor of a structure may indicate a broken drain or sewer line under the structure. Removal or drying of the organic matter where the larvae live will eliminate the problem.

CONTROL TIP FOR ADULT FLIES

For any of the above flies a pyrethrum spray may be used to control large number of adults in a confined space. Long term control depends on elimination of breeding sites.

Horse and Deer Flies

Horse flies are medium to large, heavy-bodied flies. The eyes are often brightly colored or iridescent. Only the females are blood sucking and inflict a painful bite. Males feed primarily on pollen and nectar and are often found on flowers. Females deposit eggs on plants, rocks or other objects, usually in damp locations. The larvae occur in mud and at the bottom of ponds and ditches. Many are predaceous on immature insects and other small animals. Larvae pupate in the mud near the edge of these areas. The life cycle may take from 3 months to 2 years to complete.

Adult flies are generally found near swamps, marshes, ponds and other areas where the larvae occur. Most are strong fliers and have a range up to several miles. They are most active during the warmest parts of the day and often follow moving objects.

Control is generally not feasible due to the habits of these flies. Insect repellents may be effective in preventing bites by the females.

ALWAYS READ THE PESTICIDE LABEL AND FOLLOW ALL DIRECTIONS AND SAFETY PRECAUTIONS.

Author: Mary Kay Malinoski, Regional Specialist, Home & Garden Information Center, University of Maryland Cooperative Extension, Ellicott City, MD.

References:


Mention of trade names in this publication does not constitute an endorsement by the Maryland Cooperative Extension, University of Maryland, College Park, MD.