FRUIT FLIES

Fruit flies, (*Drosophila*) are small insects about 1/9” (3mm) long. They are generally yellowish, although some tend to be brown, or have a yellowish head and brownish body. At least one species has red eyes. The large oval-shaped wings on a small body give the impression that they are powerful but clumsy fliers. The larvae, or maggots, somewhat resemble those of the house fly but are smaller.

Fruit flies infest all kinds of fruit and vegetables, as well as vinegar, cider, and other plant products, especially if these products are fermented by fungi. In fact, it is believed that in most cases the maggots feed upon the fungi rather than the spoiling plant tissues. Fruit flies have short life cycles; generally, no more than 10 to 12 days elapse from egg to adult.

CONTROLLING INFESTATIONS

Initial Prevention
Store raw vegetables and fruits in a relatively cool place (about 40° F) to prevent rapid and continuous spoiling. Inspect produce at regular intervals and remove all spoiled items.

Non-chemical control
Dispose of all fruit and vegetable peelings immediately. (A garbage disposal unit is ideal for this purpose.) Peelings and other remains of banana, apple, melons, potato, and other foods will attract fruit flies and furnish breeding places. Also, avoid purchasing produce if the skin of the produce is cut or cracked. Eggs might already have been laid in the produce with the adult fly ready to emerge, in days or hours. (Incidentally, this is the reason why fruit flies often appear suddenly around recently purchased fruit or vegetables.)

Chemical control
To control adult fruit flies, use household sprays containing pyrethrin. *(Do not treat food in the home with insecticides.* It is doubtful that many fruit flies are eliminated by directly spraying produce in the home. The most satisfactory method is to quickly dispose of all fruit and vegetable waste.)

DRAIN FLIES

Drain flies or moth flies are small hairy flies, about 1/8” (3 mm) in length. The adult fly can be identified by its wide hairy wings, which are held rooflike over its body when at rest. The fly has an irregular, hesitating, running movement and makes short jumps in flight.

Drain flies deposit their eggs in decaying organic matter found in sewage, filter beds, drains and waste waters. In a short time, the eggs hatch and small larvae (maggots) appear and feed on the decaying material. Adult flies appear in 5-14 days. In warm buildings, they continue to develop throughout the winter. Adult flies are found primarily in damp places like basements, but individuals may stray into other areas of the house. Neither the adults nor the larvae are harmful, but their presence may be a nuisance.
CONTROLLING INFESTATIONS

Non-Chemical control
Sanitation is the best control measure for drain flies. Clean out the overflow drains, drain traps and basement drains. Avoid moist debris of any nature, especially in the basement, and do not allow wet lint to accumulate under washing machines.

Chemical control
Use chemicals only after solving sanitation problems. Pour commercial drain cleaners, rubbing alcohol, household bleach or boiling water into overflow drains to eliminate maggots. To control adult drain flies, use household aerosol insecticides containing pyrethrin. (Do not put insecticides into drains.)

FUNGUS GNATS
Fungus gnats are related to drain flies and have become more of a pest problem with the increasing use of soilless potting mixes for houseplants.

The adults are dark, flylike insects about 1/8” (3 mm) long. They are attracted to light and to damp locations where fungi are likely to flourish. Adults do not cause any damage but can be a great nuisance in the home.

The larvae are thin, whitish, wormlike maggots about ¼” (6 mm) long. They feed primarily on fungi, however, they may occasionally attack roots of growing plants.

Would you like additional information?
Additional information is available on-line. Please see MSU Extension-Oakland County’s publications as well as MSU Extension’s Bulletin Office on campus.

Contact our Plant & Pest Hotline (248/858-0902) for assistance with plant identification, pests and diseases, weeds, trees and shrubs, lawn, flowers, fruits, vegetables, grasses and groundcovers, native plants, plant propagation, and many other gardening topics.