

Cluster Flies

Pest Note



Photos courtesy of: Dr. Henri Goulet, Canadian National Collection of Insects; Jeff Hahn, University of Minnesota; Beatriz Moisset; Clifton Beard

Clustering Flies – what are they?

Homeowners are often bothered by the appearance of sluggish flies in their homes in late winter and early spring. These flies are collectively called "clustering flies" but may actually be any of the three most common types of flies.

Cluster flies are approximately 8 to 10 millimetres long. They are dark grey with black and silver (non-metallic) checkered abdomens, with many golden hairs on their thorax. These may or may not be present on older flies. Unlike house flies, their wings overlap when they are at rest.

At first glance they resemble house flies; however, they are larger, darker and slower in their movements. These flies tend to be more abundant in houses surrounded by large lawns or those backing onto open parks. The name "cluster fly" is derived from their habit of gathering in clusters after entering a house in the fall and these may emit a sickly, sweetish odour if disturbed.

Face flies are another fly that closely resembles the common house fly. Face flies are pests of cattle and may hibernate in homes or invade them during the summer. Hibernating face flies have very similar habits to those of cluster flies.

Face flies are most likely to invade farm homes or homes located near pastures or where cattle are kept since the larvae develop in fresh cattle manure. During the summer, the adult female flies feed on the mucous secretions from the eyes and noses of cattle and horses.

Blow flies, also referred to as blue or green bottle flies, are robust flies with shiny metallic bodies that can often be found in homes during winter and early spring. These "buzzing" insects develop in manure or dead animal carcasses. They are strong fliers and are attracted to lamps or lights. Blow flies are usually the first insect to come in contact with a dead animal. The green bottle fly is also attracted to dog feces and garbage.

Cluster flies hibernate in secluded areas of houses, such as in wall voids, attics, closets and empty rooms. They are a particular nuisance as they leave stains on the walls and curtains. Blow flies or face flies may also hibernate in homes that are located near livestock farms or places where animal wastes or garbage accumulation are not well managed. If the flies die in the wall voids, they may attract larder beetles which will feed on the dead flies and then migrate to other areas of the house. In the spring, the sluggish clustering flies will migrate from their hibernating areas to living spaces and gather on windows as they are attracted to light.

What can they do?

Although blow flies and face flies can present a risk of food contamination due to their breeding and feeding habits, cluster flies are not usually a health hazard. However, cluster flies are a nuisance, and are parasites on our friendly earthworms. The eggs are deposited singly into cracks in the soil of lawns or open areas and hatch in approximately three to seven days. The larvae, or maggots, of clustering flies develop as parasites in the bodies of earthworms, after which they enter the soil where they pupate. The whole life cycle from egg to adult lasts between 25 and 39 days, depending on environmental conditions. There may be up to four generations per year. Adult cluster flies start looking for winter shelter



Photo: University of Wisconsin



Face Flies

Photo: Clemson University, USDA Cooperative Extension Slide Series, Bugwood.org



Blowfly

Photo: Gilles Gonthier

Responsible Pesticide Use

Before Purchasing a Pesticide

- Identify the pest correctly.
- Use physical control methods and alternatives to pesticides.
- Read the label directions and safety precautions before buying the product. The label must include the name of the pest to be controlled and the treatment location (e.g., indoor, outdoor, garden uses, pet treatment).
- Purchase only the quantity of product needed for the treatment.
- Consider hiring a licensed pest control operator.

Using a Pesticide

- Carefully read all label instructions and precautions before using pesticides.
- Do not drink, eat or smoke while applying pesticides.
- Persons and pets should vacate the area during treatment. Cover or remove aquaria.
- If kitchen area is to be treated, cover or remove food, dishes and utensils.

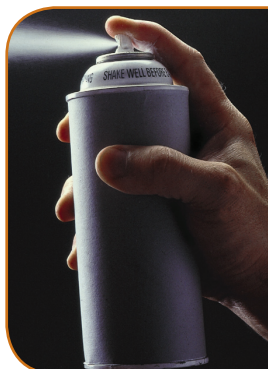
After Using a Pesticide

- Always wash your hands thoroughly after handling any pesticide product.





Fill any cracks or crevices around door and window frames with caulking.



Read the label carefully before using any pest control product.

when the days shorten in late summer and early fall. They are often attracted to the warm south and west sides of buildings, particularly those located in open and exposed areas. After sunning themselves during the day, the flies will look for a warmer place as the sun goes down and will eventually crawl into any small opening they can find in the house siding or under eaves. They may then settle within the walls or attic to hibernate. The problem becomes more evident on days when temperatures rise and the flies become more active, gathering in windows where light attracts them.

How can I manage them?

Prevention

Clustering flies can enter the home through the tiniest crevices around door and window frames, but also through any other small unsealed opening. To prevent infestation, ensure that all screens fit properly and that there are no cracks or holes which would allow them to enter into the house. Weather strip windows and doors, fill any cracks or crevices with caulking around doors, window frames and other openings in the building structure, and install insect screening over air vents in soffits.

Physical Control

Clustering flies can be controlled by simply killing them with a fly swatter. Be aware that cluster flies will release an unpleasant odour and may stain surfaces when squashed. They can also be released outdoors or vacuumed up and the vacuum bag disposed of. Devices designed to trap the clustering flies are also offered on the market. These traps, placed in windows where flies are a problem, contain a powder that works like quicksand in trapping the insects that fall in.

Products

If the infestation is severe enough to warrant the use of insecticides, products containing some of the following chemicals in various combinations are registered for controlling cluster flies: piperonyl butoxide, pyrethrin, permethrin, d-trans allethrin, n-octyl bicycloheptene dicarboximide. These products can be purchased in hardware or grocery stores and garden centres. They can be sprayed around the exterior surfaces of window and door frames to prevent entry. There are also products that can be sprayed on interior window and door frames, baseboards, localized areas of floors or floor coverings, underneath furniture, and in closets and crevices and other places where insects hide or are seen. It is important to read the label carefully and use the product according to label directions. You can also choose to consult with a professional pest control operator to solve the problem.

It is not advisable to control cluster flies by attempting to control the earthworm population because earthworms are the most natural means of producing fertile soil and the cheapest lawn aerators.

Did you know...

Cluster flies do not breed, feed or lay eggs inside homes as do some other common flies.



Photo: Beatriz Moisset

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- Do not permit persons or pets to contact treated surfaces until residue has dried completely.
- Provide adequate ventilation of treated areas after use.
- Wipe clean all surfaces that come in direct contact with food, such as counters, tables and stovetops, including indoor and outdoor surfaces.
- Always store pesticides out of reach of children and pets and away from food and beverages.

Accidental Poisoning

- Call a poison control centre immediately and seek medical attention.
- Take the pesticide container or label with you to the emergency facility or physician.
- Follow first aid statements on the label.
- In case of accidental poisoning of pets seek veterinary attention immediately.
- Report pesticide incidents to manufacturers (phone number on label). They are required to send them to Health Canada.

Disposing of Pesticides

- Do not reuse empty pesticide containers. Wrap and dispose of in household garbage.
- Follow the product label instructions or contact provincial authorities for disposal of pesticides.

Note: These are general recommendations. Consult the label for specific instructions. When in doubt, contact a professional.

Health Canada

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