



## Fall is the Time for Fruit Flies

When you see small flies or gnats in the kitchen, chances are high they're fruit flies. These tiny pests can be a problem any time of year, but they are particularly common in late summer and fall since they are attracted to ripe, damaged or fermenting fruits and vegetables.



### Identification & Lifecycle

How can you tell the annoying little gnats in your house are fruit flies? Good question, since other insects like fungus gnats are similar in appearance and size, and a common pest of houseplants. But if you look closely - using a magnifying glass if necessary - fruit flies have red eyes. A really obvious red color, not just a little brownish red. So, if the insects bothering you indoors don't have red eyes, they are probably not fruit flies.

Adult flies are about 1/8<sup>th</sup> inch long, with brownish colored bodies.

Females lay eggs on overripe or damaged fruits. After hatching, the tiny, maggot-like larvae feed near the surface of the fermenting food. The entire lifecycle, from egg to adult, can be completely in as little as a week, so the growth of fruit fly populations can quickly rise to an annoying level.

### Where Do They Come From?

You may bring fruit flies in the house without realizing it. In winter, they can be found on overripe or damaged bananas, potatoes, onions and other produce at the grocery store and brought home with your weekly shopping.

In summer, fruit fly larvae hitchhike into the house on fruits and vegetable from the garden. Plus, adult fruit flies are small enough they can get through window screens or around gaps along the edges of exterior doors if they sense a food source indoors.

Fruit flies feed in empty bottles or cans with liquid - beer, wine or pop- in the bottom. Drains, garbage disposals, mops and cleaning rags are also potential sites.

### Control

No insecticide is needed to eliminate fruit flies; the key is locating and eliminating breeding sites. Start by getting rid of all food sources such as any overripe produce. Put all remaining fresh fruits and vegetables in sealed containers or locking plastic bags if they are to be left out at room temperature, or place them in the refrigerator. Make sure to carefully check onions and potatoes -- they are often overlooked, but a rotting potato is a great food source for fruit flies.

Wipe down counters to remove any remaining sugar and do not allow unwashed dishes to stand in the sink until the fly problem is gone. Rinse bottles and cans destined for your recycling bin, and frequently take your recycling outside instead of leaving it in the house. Clean out trash cans and recycling



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containers as needed to eliminate fruit fly feeding sites. Finally, clean your kitchen's garbage disposal to eliminate any bits of food it may contain.

## Fruit Fly Trap

Once the food sources are eliminated, it can take a couple weeks for all the remaining flies to die a natural death. To speed up the process, try making a fruit fly trap. This trap is simple to create, inexpensive and effective at attracting and killing the adult flies.

Choose a small container – a juice glass, baby food jar, pop bottle, yogurt cup or old jelly jar works well. Pour about an inch of apple cider vinegar in the container, add a drop of dish soap and swirl the mixture around. You can either create a paper funnel and stick it down in the top of the container, or cover the top of the container with plastic wrap and poke a few holes in it with a toothpick.

The adult flies are particularly attracted to the scent of apple cider vinegar and will find their way down the funnel or in through the plastic wrap's holes. Once inside the jar, they will not find their way back out again. Eventually they will drown in the vinegar. Dish soap acts as a surfactant, reducing the water tension in the vinegar's surface so the flies to sink into the liquid when they land on it.

More information from Jody Green, Nebraska Extension Entomologist

- Fixing Your Fruit Fly Problem, <https://go.unl.edu/fruitflyproblem>
- Fruit Flies: The Red Eye Guys, <http://go.unl.edu/fruitfly>

## Your Suggestions are Welcome!

Is there a lawn and gardening topic you would like to learn more about? Sarah Browning is an Extension Educator with Nebraska Extension and can be contacted by phone 402 441-7180, by mail at 444 Cherrycreek Road, Lincoln, NE 68528: or by e-mail [sarah.browning@unl.edu](mailto:sarah.browning@unl.edu).

Image - wikipedia



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