



Indoor pests in the winter

In my opinion, one of the best things about winter is the lack of pest insects – like mosquitos! I think it's the payoff for having to deal with snow. But while we may be free of some, others such as fungus gnats, drain flies, and cluster flies may still be doing their best to 'bug' you!

Cluster flies are often bigger than the typical housefly we encounter during the summer. Their bodies may look black, grey, or slightly metallic in color. They live outdoors in the summer, and in the late fall move indoors when they enter a type of insect hibernation called diapause. They will take up residence in wall spaces and attics, entering through eaves, cracks around windows, etc. They will stay there until temperatures start warming up for spring, or will come out of the walls and other hiding places in the winter if your house is well heated.

As annoying as their presence can be, these cluster flies are not feeding and laying eggs on some hidden decomposing rodent somewhere which could be the case with regular house flies in the summer. Cluster flies are parasitic on earthworms alone! That means the adult cluster fly lays eggs on the earthworm, and when the eggs hatch, the larvae feed on the earthworm until they mature. So because earthworms are their only prey, cluster flies in their hibernation state aren't mating, feeding, or laying eggs.

Chemical control of these pests is usually ineffective. Because cluster flies enter homes in the fall through cracks and holes, making sure your home is well sealed is the best action to take. Trying to treat attics, or walls with foggers or other chemical means is often unsuccessful because they hide so well in small crevices, insulation, etc. Swatting or vacuuming the adults you do encounter is the best way of dealing with them. While they're still in their diapause state, they may fly erratically, or act like they're half asleep – which in a way they are and makes eliminating them a bit easier.

Fungus gnats and drain flies may also be bothering you and are a little harder to find their source. Both need moisture so they're often found in basements that tend to be a little wetter than other levels of the home. Keep any fruit or vegetable in containers if not in the refrigerator, and empty the trash cans often. Also make sure the plastic bag you use hasn't leaked – they don't need much to survive on.

Gunky buildup around drains needs to be removed or cleaned at least every few months. This will cut down on the likelihood of encountering drain flies in your home. Also make sure none of your appliances such as the dishwasher are leaking. If your basement is unusually wet, using a dehumidifier to keep the moisture level in check will also help.

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