

# **Itty-Bitty Invaders: How to Deal with Fruit Flies**

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## **Fast Facts**

- Fruit flies (also known as vinegar flies) can be differentiated from other flies with their small size (about 1/8<sup>th</sup> of an inch), their brown color, and their red eyes (Figure 1 below)
- They are attracted to fermenting items such as over-ripened fruits, old vegetables, beer and wine, and sodas
- Control is dependent upon removing their egg laying sites, sanitizing the home, and trapping the mobile adults

## **Fruit fly biology**

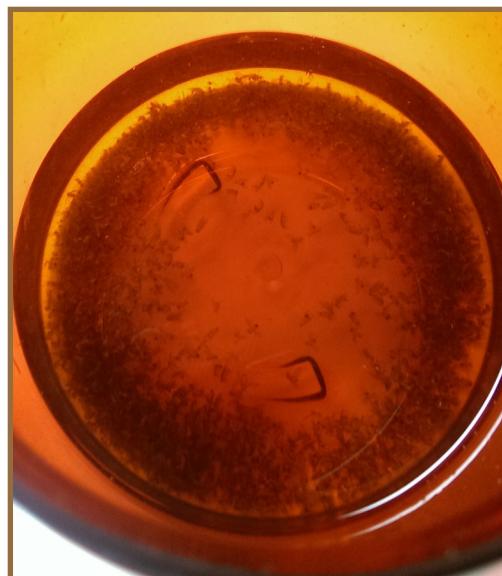
Fruit flies are usually introduced to the home by bringing in produce from the garden or store that has eggs laid on it. Adults may also fly through windows or doors and become your new roommate. Eggs hatch open to reveal tiny maggots that feed on the over ripened portions of fruits/vegetables. After feeding for a short while they pupate and become adults. Adult females can lay over 500 eggs in their life and this insect can complete development in only 7 days. This rapid development means that infestations can reach drastic (and annoying) proportions quite rapidly.

## **Management of Fruit Flies**

The first step to dealing with fruit flies is to minimize possible breeding grounds in the home. Females detect over ripened fruit or other fermenting items with their antennae and will fly towards these items to lay their eggs. Therefore, your first step will be to find any over-ripened fruit or vegetables and bag them up in a plastic bag. Throw these items out into the trash bin in the garage or outside. Also, your regular use indoor trash can should be sealable, with a lid that fits tightly and stays closed when not in use. With these steps you have prevented new flies from being attracted to your home. However, some adults are probably still there flying around. To eliminate these stragglers you can construct a simple and cheap trap to catch them. Take an empty container (a baby food jar, a yogurt cup, a pop bottle, etc.) and remove the lid and pour in 1/3 of a cup of apple cider vinegar. This particular kind of vinegar smells good to the fruit flies and will attract them to your trap. You should also add a drop of dish soap to break the surface tension of the vinegar so these small flies sink when they land on the liquid (Figure 2). Cover the top of the container with a layer of saran wrap and poke holes with a toothpick or fork. Once you take these measures the fly population will begin to diminish but complete elimination can take up to 2 weeks.



**Figure 1:** Adult fruit flies measure 1/8th of an inch and is brown with red eyes



**Figure 2:** You can use a small container with 1/3 cup of apple cider vinegar and a drop dish soap to construct an adult fruit fly trap