

Fungus Gnats

What, you ask, are fungus gnats? They are very small (approximately 1/8 inch), mosquito-like flies with dark wings, slender legs, and long antennae. They are usually found at windows and around houseplants. They are common houseflies, and are often also found in greenhouses where seedlings are being cultivated.

Fungus gnats prefer to lay their eggs in moist potting soil, and the eggs hatch about 4 days later. The larvae emerge to feed on fungus growing in the damp soil. After feeding for about 2 weeks, they pupate in the soil, and less than a week later will appear as adults. The cycle then begins again.



Interestingly, fungus gnats give birth to mostly females, and each female can lay between 100 to 300 eggs. This assures that the population will increase rapidly. It is the larvae (maggots) that cause the most damage, as they will feed on the tender new roots of seedlings. On cuttings, it appears that they feed on the developing callus, which delays the development of new roots. Adult fungus gnats also disseminate soil-inhabiting pathogens on their bodies and in their feces.

Several things can be done to monitor and control infestations of fungus gnats. First, inspect plant purchases carefully for signs of infestation. Always use sterile potting soil to prevent the introduction of fungus gnats. Over watering and poor drainage may result in breeding grounds for these pests. Also look for leaks in drip lines. Allowing the soil to dry as much as possible, without causing injury to the plants, is effective in killing many of the maggots.

Organic methods of control can include applying turkey grit or decorative white rock around plants. The sharp edges of either the grit or the rock will keep fungus gnats from getting into the soil.

If working in a greenhouse, do a thorough cleaning job before beginning any new seedlings. Be sure to clean up and dispose of any weeds that might have been tossed on the floor. They are very attractive to the fungus gnats. Yellow sticky cards placed in greenhouses will capture many adult fungus gnats. Pressing cubes or slices of potatoes just into the soil can be used to collect and dispose of the maggots, and gauge when they are feeding. This can assist in timing pesticide applications. Be sure that the potato slices do not dry out.

If you have taken any houseplants outdoors during warm weather, they may have become infested with insects before being brought back indoors. Inspect them carefully and discard them if they have become heavily infested and unable to save. Remove all old plant debris in and around the house.

Foggers, aerosols, or pyrethrins sprays labeled for "gnats" or "flying insects" will easily control adult fungus gnats. Multiple applications may be necessary. As with any chemical, be sure to read the label and follow directions and any safety precautions.

References

[Fungus Gnats – A Pest of New Seedlings and Cuttings](#). Retrieved 5/28/05.

[Fungus Gnats](#). Retrieved 5/28/05.

[Fungus Gnats](#). Retrieved 5/28/05 from UC IPM Online.