

## Tiny Flies In the House? Find the Source

There are several types of tiny flies — people commonly refer to them as “gnats” — that are sometimes found inside the home. The appearance of more than just one or two indicates that there is a breeding population close at hand.

Immature flies are known as maggots. Most fly maggots require a source of food (often decaying organic matter) that is moist or wet. Fly species may have specific food preferences. Knowing what type of fly you have can help you find the source — the key to solving the problem.



Fruit fly

### Fruit Flies

Fruit flies are among the smallest flies found in homes. They usually are a light brown color and have bright red eyes.

Fruit flies most often are found hovering around overly ripe fruit that is the food source of the fruit fly maggots. Fermenting materials, such as leftover beer or soft drinks, also are a favorite food. Populations tend to be greatest in late summer and early fall as they infest fruits during the harvest season.

**Control:** Discard overripe fruit, and rinse out bottles and cans before recycling to eliminate common breeding sites. Fruit flies are common outdoors and are so tiny that they may come into homes through screens. Make a fruit fly trap with a glass jar, a plastic baggie, rubber band and a little fruit juice or beer (see the diagram).

### Phorid flies

Phorid flies are also called “humpbacked” flies because of the extreme humpbacked appearance just behind the head. They are often confused with fruit flies, but do not have red eyes. These flies have the peculiar habit of running rapidly

along surfaces instead of immediately flying when disturbed.

Phorid flies breed in any moist decaying organic matter, especially when it is fermenting. Garbage disposals, rotting meat and vegetables, dirty mop buckets, faulty septic systems and animal feces may be the source of phorid flies.

**Control:** Find the source of the infestation and take measures to eliminate it.

### Drain Flies



Drain fly

There are a couple types of small flies that emerge from drains of sinks and seem to hover over the sink area. One type

looks like a very tiny moth; the other is a tiny dark-colored fly. Phorid flies may also breed in drains. Most of the time, the infestation is in the gelatinous gunk that lines the drain or from a garbage disposal, but flies can also be produced where there is a problem with broken or leaking pipes.

**Control:** The fastest way to solve this problem is by cleaning the drain pipes. Unfortunately, some household products are meant to dissolve clogs — not clean pipes. Bleach and hot water will not kill fly larvae breeding in the pipes. A “snake” or a stiff brush along with industrial strength drain cleaner will be most useful. Never pour insecticides down the drain.

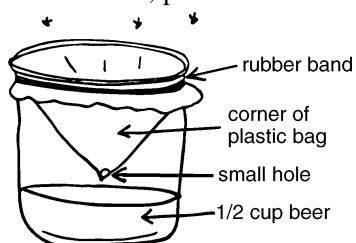
### Fungus Gnats

Fungus gnats are small, dark-colored flies most often found collecting around windows during fall and winter and hopping across the soil surface of a plant. High organic matter plant mixtures and organic fertilizers, such as fish emulsion, encourage fungus gnat development. Over watering, a common problem during fall and winter, will increase fungi and fungus

### Simple Fruit Fly Trap

**Materials needed:** jar, plastic bag, beer, rubber band

1. Pour approximately 1 inch beer into jar.
2. Place plastic bag over mouth of jar with one corner reaching down into jar.
3. Poke a small hole (no more than 1/8" diameter) in corner of bag with a pencil.
4. Secure bag around rim with rubber band or canning ring.
5. Place trap out-of-reach of children, pets.



*Fruit flies will be attracted by the fermenting beer, find their way through the tiny hole in the bottom of the funnel, and not be able to find their way out.*

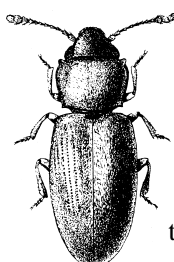
gnat development. Fungus gnats can reproduce on indoor plants and cause little if any damage. They also occur outdoors where they breed in mushrooms and other decaying plant materials.

**Control:** To control fungus gnats, correct the conditions of the breeding area. Allow the soil to dry thoroughly between watering and eliminate decomposing plant materials. This reduces the amount of fungi where fungus gnats breed. Where fungus gnats are a problem, insecticides can supplement the cultural control of reduced watering.

Most of these tiny flies are very common outdoors and can easily enter the house through window screens. Inside, the right conditions will start an infestation. Insecticides are usually not needed and will seldom solve the problem if the source of the infestation isn't found and corrected. (BPO)

## New Home? New Bugs!

A common household invader in late summer is the foreign grain beetle, which is very tiny, only 1/12" long. It is reddish-brown and has a clubbed antennae. The foreign grain beetle is a minor pest of grain products that are moist, moldy and out-of-condition because it feeds almost exclusively on fungi. Consequently, these beetles can be found in damp stored grain, spilled grain, animal feeds, and musty cereal products. They are observed in grain mills, food processing plants, damp basements, around rotting windowsills, under moldy wallpaper and on moist surfaces near leaky faucets. The strong-flying beetles are attracted to light and can sometimes be found at windows or in overhead light globes.



Foreign grain beetle

Many years ago, foreign grain beetles were nicknamed “plaster beetles” by home builders, because they appeared inside walls and rooms of new buildings that had just been plastered. Even though we don't use plaster as much today, there is still a strong association between these beetles and new homes and many pest control operators sometimes refer to these beetles as “new house bugs.”

Just drive through a new suburb and look at all the homes under construction. In new construction, there are periods when timbers are exposed to rain, humidity, snow and more. Wherever moisture occurs and timbers or drywall get wet, you can expect mold growth and later, beetle activity.

In August and September, Lancaster County staff can

expect several calls and visits from clientele who are dismayed to find hundreds of these beetles in their brand new homes. The beetles emerge from under baseboards, from behind electric outlets and from around light fixtures in ceilings. Because they are strong flyers, the beetles will spread throughout the house.

The first step to solving the problem is identification to make sure that it is not a serious wood destroying beetle emerging from wood used in construction. Once the foreign grain beetle is identified, steps should be taken to eliminate moisture problems that may be contributing to the problem. In a new house, moisture in the timbers will dry out gradually over the next months. We encourage new home owners to be patient. Over the course of several months, the beetles will gradually vanish and are not likely to reappear. (SC)

## Environmental Focus



## The Kids are Back in School — So are Head Lice. . .

Soni Cochran  
Extension Associate

You thought you had everything figured out: soccer schedules, music lessons, school supplies, lunches, new shoes and socks. Did you plan for head lice?

As we head back into the new school year, there are some steps you can take to help reduce an infestation of head lice in your home.

### Prevention

**1) Inspection:** Check your child's scalp at least once a week for evidence of head lice. By the time a child starts scratching he/she may have had lice for 30-days. Look closely at the nape of the neck and behind the ears. You usually won't see the adult lice but you may find the “nits” (lice eggs). The nits are laid close to the scalp and attached to individual hair shafts. If your child's school sends a note home reporting head lice in the classroom, check your child's scalp more often.

**2) Combs and Brushes:** Everyone in the house should have their own hair care items. This includes combs, brushes and hair accessories. Store the items in separate bins or containers. Make it a routine practice to clean the items.

**3) Hair Styles:** If your child has long hair, pull it back into a ponytail, braid or put the hair up when your child is at school or participating in activities.

**4) Sharing:** Teach your child not to share hats, hair accessories or combs with their friends at school or in the neighborhood.

**5) School:** Work with the

teachers, health specialists, and administrators in your school. If you find head lice on your child, report it immediately. The school can check other children in the class and send a note home to parents asking that they monitor for lice. By working with your school, you can help prevent reinfestations.

Head lice are found in children of all socioeconomic classes. They are very contagious and can spread easily. While there is no reason to panic (head lice do not carry serious diseases), taking action quickly is the best way to prevent the infestation of other family members. It is also important for parents to remain calm because they will need the cooperation of their child to successfully treat this problem.

Resources to help you manage head lice are available from the Lancaster County Extension office. You have access to free, “reproduction-ready” fact sheets that can be shared with your school, friends, and family. A Spanish version is also available. In addition, the award-winning video “Removing Head Lice Safely” can be purchased for \$10. The video can be viewed on-line for free via the Extension office web site.

For more information on head lice or to request the fact sheets and video, call the Lancaster County Extension office at 441-7180 or visit the office web site at [www.lancaster.unl.edu](http://www.lancaster.unl.edu).

*Next month's NEBLINE - “My child was sent home with head lice, now what do I do?”*

## Fall Household Hazardous Waste Collections

Saturday, Sept. 22 • 9:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m.  
Pfizer Inc, 601 W. Cornhusker Hwy, Lincoln

Saturday, Nov. 3 • 9:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m.  
State Fair Park, 4-H Youth Complex, Lincoln

### Items that you can bring for disposal:

Heavy metals: items containing mercury such as thermometers and thermostats.

Solvents: mineral spirits, turpentine, paint strippers and thinners, oil-based paints, varnishes, stains, polishes and waxes.

Pesticides: weed killers, garden sprays, wood preservatives, roach powder, rat poisons. You may also bring EPA banned products, like DDT, chlordane, 2,4,5-T, pentachlorophenol, silvex, PCP.

PCBs: Ballasts from old fluorescent fixtures and capacitors from old appliances including radios, motors and televisions.

Leave products in their original container and keep the label intact. Open, leaking or rusted containers should be placed in a clear plastic bag during transport. Do not mix chemicals.

### Do not bring:

Latex paint, medicines, explosives or ammunition, fertilizers, used oil, general household trash, antifreeze or batteries.

Questions? Call the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department at 441-8040. (BPO)