

What is Flying Around In My House?

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

I honestly can not remember a fall when I've seen so many flying insects in my house or buildings in general! We've already talked about the multicolored Asian ladybeetles this year. This hasn't been too bad of a year for boxelder bugs (a.k.a. democrats) mainly because they prefer drier weather, and we've had rain. But there are several flying insects that we haven't talked about, but I've been asked about a lot!

Let's first understand that flies and many of the little critters we call gnats (and mosquitoes) are in the insect order called Diptera. Most insects have two pairs of wings (think butterflies, dragonflies, etc.) Insects in the order Diptera have one pair of wings - the order name literally means, two wings. All Diptera go through a complete life cycle with a larval form that is often called a maggot. While a few fly species feed on dead animals in the larval form, many develop feeding on rotting vegetation or manure. While some species are well known for their bad habit of biting animals, including humans, many species are very beneficial.

Some of the flying insects in are home are small gnat like flies. Some of these come in with potted plants in the fall. Some actually develop on the gunk in household drains, and some feed on over ripe fruit. One small fly that we commonly see this time of year is the moth fly. It is small and has very rounded wings and if you look closely enough you will see white spots on the wings.

What really gets homeowners attention though are the big dark flies that have a very buzzy sound when they fly around our homes. While we often just call these "attic" flies, there is no such species. Usually these are face flies although they can also be house flies. These two species are closely related. Face flies are a nuisance to livestock producers as they gather around the eyes, nose, and mouth of livestock. They don't bite to suck blood, but they are still quite a nuisance. Face flies lay their eggs generally in manure but they are strong fliers and as adults can travel a long ways from where they fed as a maggot.

These flies force their way into buildings through any opening, sometimes quite small openings, or just being opportunistic and flying in as a door is opened. Once inside a building they will try to find any out of the way place to over winter, although many of them end up dying shortly after getting inside. You may vacuum several hundred out of the window sills of your house only to have to do it again a few days later. These flies don't damage anything in your home, but they are still annoying.

Colder weather will slow them down. Ultimately the best approach is to get the house sealed up to prevent their entry. Windows, doors, and vents are the most common locations where face flies enter a house. These are also areas that can allow heat to escape a house in the winter! Premise residual sprays aren't that effective unless you can find a location where they routinely gather. Aerosol sprays will knock down the individuals you can see. Ultimately a vacuum cleaner may be the best solution. In attics or storage rooms with little air movement or where people spend less than four hours a day, the insecticide impregnated strips such as the "no-pest strips" can help. But read and follow all label directions and warnings on these.

The problem is worse this year because of all the rain and the extended warmth of the season. Cold weather will eventually bring this problem to an end. Until then, keep the fly swatter and the vacuum cleaner handy!!