



Question of the Week

Q: Have you ever wondered about those little black flies that invade your home in January?

A: Fear not, these pests—called fungus gnats—are a nuisance, but are completely harmless to humans and animals. Nearly everyone who's grown a houseplant has had a visit from them at one time or another. Fungus gnats are common non-biting flies that normally go unnoticed. They're plentiful outdoors in fungi, damp soil and decayed vegetable matter. Occasionally they wander inside.

A persistent problem with large numbers of fungus gnats inside may indicate an indoor breeding site, which almost always turns out to be houseplant potting soil. Houseplants are especially prone to pest problems because their indoor location isolates them from many natural controls.

The best way to control fungus gnats is through good cultural practices. Carefully examine new plants for any signs of insect infestation before purchase. If you put your houseplants outdoors in the summer, make sure they are insect-free before bringing them back into the house. Always use sterile potting mix when planting or repotting. Take care not to over-water plants, as fungus gnats require a moist environment to feed and breed. With careful inspection and diligent attention to soil condition, you'll reduce the incidence of these pesky gnats significantly.

Got questions? UNH Cooperative Extension's Family, Home & Garden Education Center Info Line offers practical help finding answers for your lawn and garden questions. Call toll free at 1-877-398-4769, M-F, 9:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m., or e-mail us at answers@unh.edu