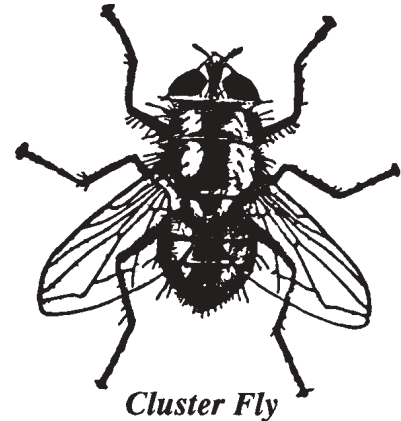




Cluster Flies

Introduction

The large sluggish flies known as cluster, or “attic,” flies often invade New Hampshire homes in the fall to become annoying wintertime pests. They are particularly noticeable on warm days when they become active and find their way into our living quarters. Just when you think you have them under control, more will appear the next day, creating the impression they are breeding inside the house. In reality, they are only using your home as a place to spend the winter and do not cause damage to the building, furnishings or occupants.



Cluster Fly

Description & life cycle

To the layperson, cluster flies have no obvious characteristics that distinguish them from ordinary house flies. During the summer cluster flies are active outdoors, where they are parasitic on certain earthworms. Adult females lay their eggs near the openings of earthworm burrows. Upon hatching, the young larvae move into the earthworm burrows and penetrate the earthworms' bodies. After feeding on the worms, the fly larvae pupate in the soil. The adults emerge to repeat the cycle, with up to four generations being produced each summer.

The adults from the last generation in the fall seek protected areas in which to spend the winter. They invade attics, get under siding and around windows and into crevices on the outside of buildings. Many will eventually congregate between the walls and may work their way into a room through openings in the window frames and electrical fixtures. Cluster flies are usually sluggish and make little attempt to escape, so they can easily be picked up with a vacuum cleaner. On warm days in early spring they move outdoors and are often seen covering the sunny side of a house.

Control

Prevention and non-chemical control

The best line of defense against cluster flies is to prevent their entrance into the building. However, with some of our older, wooden rural structures this is virtually impossible. Where possible, seal up cracks in the siding and around windows with the caulking compound and cover attic vents with wire screening.

Chemical control

The pesticide Cypermethrin, applied to the outside of buildings during the first or second week in August, has residual effects that will prevent cluster flies from entering your dwelling space. Because this pesticide is available only to licensed pesticide applicators, you will need to hire a pest control firm to apply it.

Indoors, if you don't want to use a fly swatter, you can kill stray flies that emerge into living quarters with household fly sprays containing pyrethrins plus piperonyl butoxide. Follow label directions and consider using a canister-style respirator to prevent inhaling spray, as you will be spraying around window frames and door openings. If you use a vacuum cleaner to clear up the sluggish flies, you may need to remove the bag and place it outdoors, or the flies inside may just crawl back out.

***Stop!** This publication contains pesticide recommendations that are subject to change at any time. UNH Cooperative Extension provides these recommendations only as a guide. It is always the pesticide applicator's responsibility, by law, to read and follow all current label directions for the specific pesticide being used. Because of constantly changing labels and product registration, some of the recommendations offered in this publication may no longer be legal by the time you read them. Contact the NH Division of Pesticide Control at (603) 271-3550 to check registration status. If any information in these recommendations disagrees with the label, you must disregard the recommendations and follow the label directions. No endorsement is intended for products mentioned, nor criticism intended for products not mentioned.*

*Store pesticides in their original containers in a locked cabinet or shed away from food. Dispose of unused pesticides or empty containers safely, according to NH regulations. If you suspect pesticide poisoning, call the New Hampshire Poison Control Center at **1-800-562-8236**.*

Reviewed and edited by UNH Extension Entomologist Dr. Alan Eaton, 9/01

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