

Cluster Flies

Cluster fly is a collective name given to several fly species that spend the winter as adults in sheltered places, including homes and other structures. The flies arrive in early fall, resting for a time on external walls before entering through vents, cracks, or gaps in siding.

Cluster flies usually accumulate in wall voids, attics, and sunny rooms with southern or western exposures. They are an annoyance but they do not breed indoors, and do not cause any damage. The flies will become active on warm days, crawling and flying to windows in an attempt to go outside.

The *face fly* is the most common cluster fly species in homes and structures near pastured cattle and can occur in large numbers. Their larvae develop only in fresh cattle manure. During the summer, the adult flies feed on the mucous secretions from the eyes and faces of cattle and horses. The flies leave animals in the fall, moving to sheltered wintering sites, often in white or light-colored buildings. Face flies return to cattle in late spring and remain near them during the summer.

Blue or green bottle flies have shiny dark blue to green metallic bodies and make a loud “buzzing” sound as they fly. Usually, there are only a few. They seek shelter in the fall but can be seen indoors most any time of year. Typical breeding sites for these flies are garbage, pet waste, and animal carcasses. They can be found in urban and rural areas.

Cluster fly is the recognized common name for a sluggish gray fly with short golden “hairs” on its body. The larvae of this insect develop as parasites in earthworms. They also can occur in urban and rural areas.

Managing cluster flies

Unfortunately, there is no way to eliminate breeding sites of cluster flies. Therefore, exclusion is an important part of keeping cluster flies from entering structures. However, it is impossible to eliminate or seal every possible opening that they may use. Some flies may find their way in after even the most conscientious pest-proofing efforts.

Indoors

Cluster flies tend to be sluggish so many can be swatted or sucked up using a hand-held vac. This is the most effective way to deal with them. Insecticide sprays and foggers generally have little effect. Cluster flies do not move about much so fly paper, fly strips, and bug electrocuters generally have limited effect on fly numbers. Dead flies are a food source for carpet beetles and other scavengers so it is a good idea to clean up and discard those that are found.

Outdoors

Often cluster flies, especially face flies, will congregate in large numbers on outside walls in the fall before they enter structures. A number of products are available to homeowners for application to outside walls for control of accidental invaders such as cluster flies, boxelder bugs, etc. Common active ingredients in these products include: cyfluthrin, cypermethrin, lambda-cyhalothrin, deltamethrin, or permethrin. Results are best if flies are contacted directly by the spray. There will be some lasting effect against flies landing on treated surfaces but the residue will be degraded by sunlight and weathering. Several applications may be needed because the flies move to shelter over a period of time rather than all at once. These applications may leave visible residues on treated areas. Spring movement is directed outside so easing their departure is a good strategy.