

## Fruit Flies Common in the Autumn Kitchen

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Have you been seeing tiny gnats flying around your kitchen lately? These are most likely fruit flies, and while most of us see them as merely a nuisance, they can contaminate food with bacteria and other disease organisms.

Fruit flies are tiny, about one-eighth inch long. They are tan and black, and usually have red eyes. While they can be a problem any time of the year, fruit flies are most common in late summer and fall, as they are attracted to ripe and over-ripe fruits and vegetables.

Fruit flies lay their eggs near the surface of fermenting foods and other moist organic materials. They also will breed in drains, garbage disposals, empty bottles and cans, trash containers, mops and cleaning rags. All that is needed for development is a moist film of fermenting material. After hatching, the tiny larvae feed on the fermenting mass for several days, completing their life cycle in about one week. One female can lay up to 500 eggs, so their numbers can build up quickly.

Infestations can originate from over-ripened fruits or vegetables that were previously infested and brought into the home. The adults can also fly in from outside through inadequately screened windows and doors.

The best way to avoid problems with fruit flies is to eliminate sources of attraction. Produce which has ripened should be eaten, discarded or refrigerated. Cracked or damaged portions of fruits and vegetables should be cut away and discarded in case eggs or larvae are present in the wounded area. A single rotting potato or onion forgotten at the back of a closet, or fruit juice spillage under a refrigerator can breed thousands of fruit flies. So can a recycling bin which is never emptied or cleaned. Windows and doors should be equipped with tight-fitting (16 mesh) screens to help prevent adult fruit flies from entering from outdoors.

To control fruit flies, all potential breeding areas must be located and eliminated, otherwise the problem will continue. Wash down counters and tables regularly; mop floors, especially under appliances where juices or food scraps could be; mops and sponges should be thoroughly cleaned or disposed of. Since fruit flies may breed in the slime in our drains, pour a large pot of boiling water down the drain to kill them; follow this with a drain cleaner, to remove the buildup.

Fruit fly traps can be used to remove flying adults. You can buy such traps in local garden centers, or make them. Simply make a paper funnel from notebook paper, and suspend that in a jar. Pour a few ounces of cider vinegar, or piece of banana, into the trap as a lure. The fruit flies can get in, but they can't get out. Place the trap in a freezer for an hour or two to kill the fruit flies, then rebait and start again.

For more information on fruit flies or other garden pests, contact the Purdue Extension Service at 812-435-5287.