

Fruit Flies

(Vinegar Flies – *Drosophila* spp.)



Fruit fly (adult)



Fruit flies on overripe fruit



Fruit fly pupae

Identification – Fruit flies are about 1/8 inch long and tan, usually with bright red eyes and a darker rear end. They hover around the fruit bowl, trash can and sink, and they don't bite. But not every tiny fly is a fruit fly. People call three different flies "drain flies," and the fix is different for each one. **Fruit flies** breed in fermenting food, in places like disposals, trash cans and overripe produce. **Moth flies** are fuzzy and gray, like tiny moths, and they work their way up from the sewer main and feed on sludge in pipes, so every drain in the house needs to be treated, not just one, or they'll simply come up through another. **Phorid flies** are small, humpbacked flies that tend to run across the counter instead of flying off, and they're usually a sign of a plumbing problem, like a broken drain or septic line. Tiny dark flies around houseplants, on the other hand, are fungus gnats from overwatered soil.

Biology – A female lays about 500 eggs near fermenting food, decaying organic matter and moist cracks. The eggs hatch in about 30 hours, the maggots feed on the yeast for 5 or 6 days and then pupate, and the new adults mate within 2 days. That's how a few flies become a cloud of them in a couple of weeks. A single lemon wedge left to ferment under a cabinet or appliance can support thousands of fruit flies.

What we find – In homes, the source is usually the garbage disposal or the gunk in the bottom of the kitchen trash can, under the bag liner. Other common spots include recycling bins, overripe fruit, forgotten potatoes or onions, dirty mops and dust pans, drains, and food that has rolled under the refrigerator or stove. They don't breed inside the refrigerator, because it's too cold and the food in there is mostly fresh. In restaurants and bars, the places to check are floor drains, beer tap troughs and lines, and cracked tile and grout.

What works – **Fruit flies are a sanitation issue, period.** Control is nearly impossible without finding and removing the breeding site. Sprays and traps only kill the adults you see. They give a false sense of "doing something," but they can never completely solve a fruit fly problem. We can help you track down breeding sites. Our method is a mix of bleach and hot water, and enzyme drain cleaners are an alternative. Both work the same way, by removing the buildup in drains and tile cracks where the flies lay their eggs, but use one or the other, not both at the same time. A light aerosol treatment can knock down the adults during the cleanup.

What you can do – Most home fruit fly problems can be solved without us. Pour a mix of one part bleach to three parts hot water into each sink drain every night for 5 days, to kill the bacteria fermenting the buildup the flies breed in. When you run the disposal and think you've run it long enough, count to 10 and keep going. Pull the bag and wash out the kitchen trash can, and rinse bottles and cans before they go in the recycling. Refrigerate or toss ripe fruit, check for soft potatoes and onions, and dry out your mops. While you clean, a jar of cider vinegar with a drop of dish soap will catch adults, but it won't fix the source.

When to call Dynamic – Give us a call if the flies are still there a week or two after you've cleaned up, if you can't find where they're coming from, or if they might be phorid or moth flies coming from a drain. And if you're not sure whether it's a fruit fly, a drain fly or a gnat, send us a close-up photo and we'll identify it for you.