

Oh, those nasty flies.

God in His wisdom
Made the fly
And then forgot
To tell us why.

Ogden Nash, poet

More than a dozen fly species visit or live in the house. The true housefly or *Musca domestica* are the most common insect pest, worldwide. It is possible to distinguish among some of them only by such minute criteria as the pattern of veins in the wings.

When the weather turns warm, house flies can produce a new generation in less than 2 weeks, giving them tremendous breeding potential. In optimal conditions, two or more generations may be produced per month.

The lesser housefly or *Fannia canicularis* can usually be found around the barnyard. A third, the *Musca autumnalis* or face fly tends to stay away from buildings during the warmer months but as the weather cools they will move to the sides of buildings to stay warm, eventually moving inside the building as the colder months arrive.

The female, according to Richard Coniff, who wrote *Spineless Wonders-Strange tales from the invertebrate world*, spends over 40% of her time studying the sweetness of life. We know she eats unspeakable things and she spends an additional 30% of her time spitting it up and blowing bubbles with it. The male is less diligent at the lovely pastime. One researcher reports that a well fed fly poo's every 4 and ½ minutes.

"Of course, it is the flies intimacy with humans that make them so contemptible," says Coniff.

Houseflies spend the winter months as adults, making any warm area their home. When spring arrives they emerge and the fertile females deposit their eggs in rotted or decaying materials. Each female will deposit no less than 100 eggs that will hatch in around one day. The larva of the housefly, commonly called maggots, will pupate for almost a week before becoming adults. In warm areas it is not uncommon for the female housefly to produce up to ten broods each year. Predators of the housefly include man, birds, reptiles and amphibians. Interestingly, houseflies have become immune to many of the pesticides used by man to destroy them. Birds attack the housefly during its larva stage, while reptiles and amphibians find houseflies quite a delicacy in the adult stage of their life.

House flies lay their eggs in moist organic material. Animal droppings, garbage cans, fermenting vegetation such as grass clippings are premium breeding media. Also food left on the kitchen counter. It is sensible to first identify and then clean up fly breeding areas to control its populations. Knowing flies habits can help a person with information needed to help control it.

When the adult fly emerges from the egg, it crawls about rapidly, unfolds its wings, and its body dries and hardens. This process may take about an hour, and then mating occurs immediately. A house fly may go through its entire life cycle-egg, larva, pupa, adult in 6 to 10 days, after which the adult fly may live about a month." (California Master Gardener Handbook)

Even with all their disgusting habits, there is at least one interesting fact about the housefly. These busy little insects are quite important in the break down of waste materials since this is their main diet in all stages of their life.

The over-use of insecticides, however, though effective on flies, present a very real threat to a most significant insect pollinator, the bee. This subject deserves a dedicated article but because of the confines of space, I must limit my topic to the fly this time around.

In keeping with an open mind, an alternative approach might be to breed and train the flies to take care of our pollination needs.

Can you imagine using surplus money in the university budget to fund a study to train flies to pollinate?

Oh, just kidding!

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