

# Cluster Fly



Peggy K. Powell, Ph.D.  
Extension Specialist – Pesticide Impact

Although they don't bite, sting, or carry disease, cluster flies can be a major nuisance in houses. Because of their unusual developmental habits, cluster flies also are one of the trickiest household pests to control.

## Identification

The adult cluster fly, *Pollenia rudis*, is 5/16-inch long, slightly larger than a common house fly. It is nonmetallic gray in color with golden hairs on its thorax. When it lands on a surface, it folds its wings one on top of the other flat over its back. Cluster fly larvae look like typical maggots, but are seldom seen because they spend their lives as parasites inside earthworms.

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## Biology and Habits

In the spring, adult cluster flies emerge from their overwintering sites, mate, and lay eggs in cracks in the soil. After hatching, the tiny larvae search out their earthworm hosts. The life cycle of a cluster fly from egg to adult requires about 28 days. Four generations per year are possible.

The earthworm hosts of cluster fly larvae inhabit well-drained loam soil where grass is the primary type of vegetation. These earthworms do not live in soil under large trees. Houses surrounded by large trees are therefore rarely infested.

In early fall, adult cluster flies begin looking for places to hibernate. Loose tree bark or vegetation may provide a secluded spot, but often they

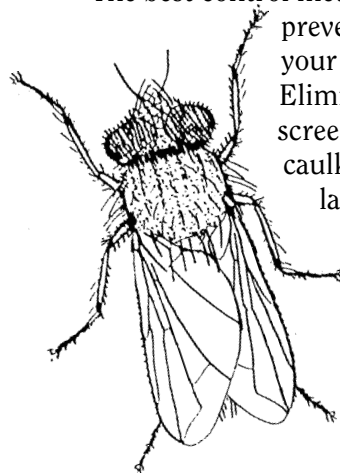
enter houses, particularly older frame houses. They may fly in through open windows or doors or squeeze in through cracks and crevices. They are attracted mainly to the warm south and west sides of buildings. Though they enter one by one, they often "cluster" together like a swarm of bees, hence their name.

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Once inside, the flies may go unnoticed in their hiding places, often in an attic, a wall void, or a suspended ceiling, until a warm spell hits and they become active. Cluster flies are attracted to light. On warm days when temperatures are above 55 degrees F, they often congregate around windows.

## Prevention Methods

The best control method for cluster flies is to prevent them from entering your house in the first place. Eliminate entry points by screening attic louvers and by caulking cracks. Pay particular attention to the south and west sides of the



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house. Indoor exclusion techniques include caulking cracks and crevices around ceiling fixtures and baseboards in rooms where flies were seen in previous years. This should help to prevent flies that do get into wall voids from getting into the living areas of the house.

### **Control Strategies**

The target stage for control of most fly pests is the larval stage, when control is based on elimination of breeding material. But, because cluster fly larvae are parasitic on earthworms, and earthworms are an important part of the soil fauna, the larval stage of the cluster fly is not a practical target for control. Thus, the only feasible control methods for cluster flies center around keeping the adults out of houses and killing those that do manage to get inside. Inspect the south and west sides of your house for cracks and try to determine where the cracks lead, thereby locating the voids where the flies may overwinter. Treat the voids with a less toxic insecticide dust such as

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silica gel or boric acid. You may need to remove electrical plates to gain access to the void.

If all else fails, you may need to hire a professional pest control firm. They should apply a pyrethroid insecticide to entry points on the sunlit sides of the house in late summer or early fall. This application is made before the flies begin their search for overwintering spots in order to kill flies as they attempt to enter.

Adult flies that still manage to find their way indoors can be killed with a fly swatter, removed with a vacuum cleaner, or trapped with sticky fly traps designed to be placed at windows. Insecticide-impregnated pest strips are not recommended due to their toxicity to humans.

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