

# Controlling Houseflies

*Jeffery K. Tomberlin, Extension Entomology Specialist  
The Texas A&M University System*

The housefly, *Musca domestica*, is found worldwide and lives in close proximity to humans. Because houseflies can carry many diseases of humans and domestic animals, it is important to keep their populations low. Understanding their habits and life cycle can help you eliminate the most flies at the lowest cost to you and the environment.

## Description

The housefly is a non-biting fly measuring about ¼ inch long. Adult houseflies have two wings and four lengthwise black stripes on their backs. The abdomen typically appears checkered.

Houseflies are often confused with flesh flies and stable flies. A flesh fly has only three stripes on its back, and the tip of its abdomen is usually red. The stable fly feeds on blood, and its mouthparts protrude from the front of its head.

## Life Cycle

Houseflies live for up to 3 weeks and are active during the warmer part of the year. An adult female deposits 50 to 100 eggs at a time and about 500 eggs over her lifetime. The eggs are deposited in rotting organic matter. They hatch after about 12 hours; and the larvae, or maggots, feed on the rotting organic material.

A maggot passes through three larval stages and then forms a pupa, or cocoon. The adult fly emerges from the cocoon. Houseflies typically develop from an egg to adult within 10 days. They can be suppressed by these three types of control methods: cultural, biological and chemical. It is best to use all three methods.

## Cultural Control

This method changes the environment to prevent houseflies from developing. The best cultural method is to dispose of any organic matter properly. This includes vegetable or other food by-products, where houseflies might lay eggs. Place these materials in garbage bags and tie the bags securely. Remove all food residues and clean your garbage cans weekly.

Another cultural method is to keep houseflies out of homes and businesses by the following practices:

- ♦ keeping windows screened and doors closed
- ♦ placing exhaust (blower) systems above doors
- ♦ installing doors that open and close mechanically

Placing sticky traps and ultraviolet light traps around a home or business also can reduce housefly populations. Hang resin strips (flypaper) in infested areas where there is little or no air movement. You place one 10-inch strip per 1,000 cubic feet of space. Install the fly strips within 6 feet of the floor because most fly activity is near the ground. The strips are effective for up to about 3 months or until completely covered with flies.

Install light traps where they cannot be seen by flies outdoors to avoid attracting more insects to the building. To make the traps more noticeable to the flies in a room, place them at least 15 feet away from doors and other entryways and in darker areas away from bright lights and sunlight. Place the traps at least 5 feet away from food preparation areas to minimize the risk of food contamination. It is important to maintain the traps. Replace the bulbs each spring just before the peak season of fly activity because older bulbs lose their attractiveness to insects. Also, clean them out regularly because dead flies serve as food for other insects.

## Biological Control

Parasitic wasps and fire ants suppress housefly populations naturally. If you want to use this form of natural pest control, you can order fly pupae from insectaries in Texas or across the United States. The pupae, which are already infected with the parasites, can be spread around homes or near where houseflies are developing. Place the pupae in areas out of direct sunlight to prevent anyone from stepping on them.

Parasitic wasps do not harm people or animals. They kill immature houseflies. However, parasitic wasps take time to work, and they alone will not eliminate a housefly population. Combine this technique with other methods.

## Chemical Control

When necessary, insecticides can help suppress housefly populations. Fly baits, such as Quick-Bayt® and Golden Malrin®, are usually sugar-based and contain a compound that attracts the adult flies. Flies that feed on these baits are killed by the insecticide they digest.

Many spray pyrethroid-based insecticides can suppress houseflies in and around homes. You can buy these products at grocery and hardware stores. Follow the instructions on all insecticide labels.

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