

Those Pesky Houseplant Pests!

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This is the time of year when I often spot pesky plant pests taking up residence in my office space. I have seen fungus gnats flying around where the majority of my houseplants call home. They love wet potting soil. I have overwatered again.

Fungus gnats (*Bradysia* species) are the tiny little dark flies you see jumping and flying on top of the soil and around your treasured houseplants. They are the flies you swat at and can't seem to grab or squish. As I sit in a Zoom meeting, one flies in front of my computer screen, and I reach out to grab it. Missed! The good news is they will not injure your plants (or you) and they do not like dry soil.

The adults live for just a few days and lay their eggs in soil cracks around the base of the plant. When the eggs hatch, the maggots (larvae) feed on fungi and decaying organic matter that collects on the potting soil, as well as plant root hairs.

Keeping your soil dry between waterings will help with control. Sticky yellow cards sold at garden centers help attract and catch the adults, and sprays of pyrethrins and pyrethroid insecticides are effective, but you would have to spray frequently. It is more effective to control the larva. *Bacillus thuringiensis* var. *israelensis* is effective as a soil drench. These products are easily found online or check with your local garden center. Products are sold as Gnatrol or Mosquito Bits. Repeated applications will be necessary for long-term control.

Another pest that can infect your houseplants is the greenhouse whitefly (*Trialeurodes vaporariorum*). Adults are a white winged insect that have a wax coating and lay eggs on leaves. The eggs hatch in three to seven days and produce nymphs. Most of the injury to your plants is done from nymphs. They feed on the underside of leaves, so check the bottom of leaves every time you water. They feed for up to a month, then change to an inactive "pupal" stage that lasts one to two weeks, then the cycle repeats itself, with the new adults laying eggs for up to two months. This cycle will continue with ideal conditions. Insecticides containing pyrethrins are the most effective for controlling the adults.

When you bring home a new plant, bring plants in from outdoors, or receive a gifted plant, keep it in another location from your other houseplants for about three weeks, so pests can't migrate. Monitor the plant for signs of insects or disease.

As for my own fungus gnat infestation, I put yellow sticky cards on the plants and moved them into a guest room. I am making sure to dry out the potting media before watering. There are CSU Extension fact sheets that are a great resource for all kinds of pesky houseplant pests who may be visiting you. These fact sheets have more information on the pests in this article, as well as several other pesky pests. Visit extension.colostate.edu and read Fact Sheet #5.584 "Fungus Gnats are Houseplant and Indoor Pests", #5.587 "Greenhouse Whitefly", and #5.595 "Managing Houseplant Pests".

If you have gardening questions, indoors or out, the Master Gardeners are here to help! Email LarimerMG@gmail.com year-round for answers to your questions. Or call the CSU Extension Office in Larimer County at 970-498-6000.

Estes Valley Community Garden Board thanks Mary Pat for sharing her gardening expertise with us. The CSU Extension website, extension.colostate.edu, is a treasure trove of garden and home resources. For information about the Estes Valley Community Garden, please visit our website at evcg.org.