

Pest Fact sheet No 6

Cluster flies

Name Common cluster fly

Latin name *Pollenia rudis*

Size Adult 10 mm-15 mm long



Identification features

Adult



Largish black flies with gold and silver hairs on the thorax.
Prominent eyes and clear wings.

Larva

Larvae are never seen as they live in earthworms.

Life cycle

The flies become a problem in the Autumn when they try to enter buildings to hibernate. The life cycle is very unusual in that the adults lay eggs in grass in the Spring. The hatching larvae then parasitise earthworms and develop in their bodies. In the Autumn the adult flies emerge and then need to overwinter indoors.

They are attracted to warm sunny south facing walls where they will rest before climbing up to enter through gaps around windows or eaves.

They will then hibernate in large clusters, which may be over 1,000 individuals, often in attics and voids. They will remain there until the following Spring when they will try to return to the outside. However, warm conditions inside which may be caused by turning on heating will cause them to start flying around.

They will cause some spotting and staining with fly vomit and excreta, but the main problem is due to annoyance as they slowly buzz around.

The bodies of the flies will also provide an ideal food supply for pests such as carpet beetles and spider beetles.

Signs of infestation

Frequently found in large numbers in upstairs and attic rooms on windows and windowsills.



Cluster flies on a South-facing window in the Autumn.

Large numbers of cluster flies on a windowsill in Autumn



Control measures

Aerosol sprays containing pyrethrins or pyrethroids will kill flies, but it is important to remove dead flies to prevent them becoming food for pests.

Ultra violet fly killer units can also be used if acceptable. UV uplighters with sticky boards are often the most effective, but they must be regularly cleaned and maintained.

Preventing entry

This is the most effective way of preventing problems but it can be difficult to achieve in practice.

Sash windows can be a particular route of entry in many old houses and they can be proofed using bristle strips to close gaps.

Mesh in eaves gaps may be effective but this must not be allowed to restrict air circulation.

Similar species

Autumn fly *Musca autumnalis*, will also hibernate in buildings over winter

Housefly *Musca domestica*. These have a patterned thorax and breed in rotting refuse.

Blowflies *Calliphora* and *Lucilia*. These are larger and frequently come from dead animals such as pigeons and mice.

There are also two other less common species of cluster flies, *Thaumatomyia*, a small yellowish fly, and *Dasyphora cyanella*, a small metallic green fly.