

(Other Houseplant Pests continued)

Scale: These are usually flat, round bugs that attach along woody stems or leaves. You will likely notice their sticky residue before you notice the bug. If your plant is small or numbers are few, simply scrape them off. Soap sprays are not effective against their hard shells but horticultural oil will smother them. Once sprayed, the dead scale bug will not fall off by itself.

Spider Mite: Teeny tiny mites that suck the undersides of the leaves. You will notice a mottling of your leaves or that they have a sandy feel to them. Spider mites LOVE dry conditions and air. Prevent them on plants by rinsing off leaves when you water or by raising humidity. Webbing may occur with infestations. Treat with horticultural oil or other pesticides labeled specifically for spider mites. Soaps are least effective.

Whitefly: Small bright white flies the size of a fungus gnat will flutter about when you touch your plants. Rinse the bottoms of the leaves and then use sticky traps. You may also need to use a systemic as populations increase rapidly.

Alternatively, you may choose to use a systemic labeled for indoor plants such as 'Bonide Systemic Houseplant Insecticide.' These types of pesticides act as an all purpose defense. Be aware that systemics do not control all problems well and the pesticide will be taken up into the plant. This will make your plant toxic to pets and people for up to several months.



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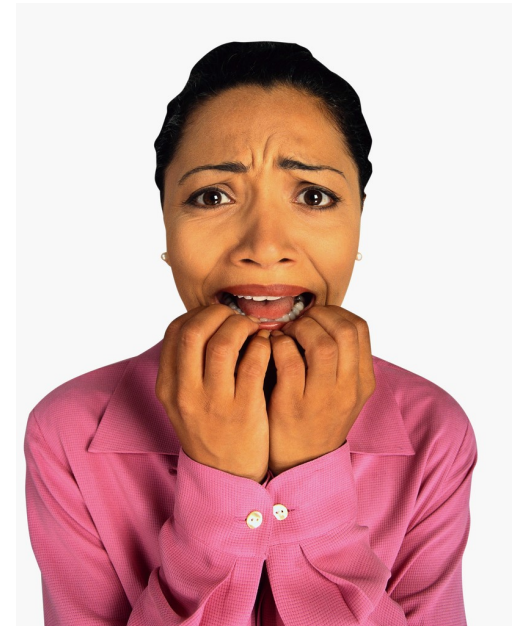
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Fungus Gnats and other Houseplant Pests



Those aren't fruit flies!

If you've had houseplants for any length of time, you've probably had fungus gnats at some point. They look like tiny black fruit flies in and around your houseplants.

Fungus Gnat Life Cycle

Fungus gnats feed on fungi or organic matter in the soil. The adult gnat lives for about a week, laying up to 200 eggs in moist soil. Eggs hatch after a few days into larvae, which spend the next few weeks feeding on the fungi. Larvae develop into pupa, and finally into the winged creature that demands a call to Phelan Gardens for answers.

So how might you rid yourself of these pests?

Here are a few suggestions:

Yellow Sticky Traps:



Small infestations can be detected & controlled using monitor cards—small, yellow sticky traps that capture the flying adult and interrupt the life cycle. They are a great way to determine if one plant in particular is heavily infested. If so,

move this plant away from your other pots until you get the problem under control.

Change Your Watering Habits

Often, we get more calls about fungus gnat problems during the winter months. Houseplants typically don't drink as much during this time of year, so adjust your watering

accordingly so that your plant is not continually wet. If you have the type of plant that can go drier between drinks, then do so. Provide a thorough drink for your plants, but allow them to achieve a slight wilt before the next drink. Also, make sure that the plant tray underneath the pot does not continually contain standing water.

Use Sterile Soil

Fungus—the food fungus gnats are seeking—grows on decomposing organic matter. So, if your potting soil contains a lot of wood pieces or bark, you are more likely to have problems with gnats. We recommend peat-based Ferti-lome Ultimate Potting Mix as a sterile soil and all around great option for most tropical houseplants. In many cases, you can simply remove the top 1" of soil from containers (where the majority of fungus gnat eggs/larvae reside), and replace with fresh sterile potting soil. However, if you initially potted your plants in non-sterile soil with lots of wood chips, it may be necessary to replace all of the soil to eliminate the gnat's food source.

Another trick is to replace the top 1" of soil with play sand. Fungus will not grow on sand thus making this an effective way to get rid of many of the pests waiting to emerge from soil.

Consider A Pesticide

For larger infestations, you can use a pesticide that contains BTi (*bacillus thuringiensis* var. *israelensis*) such as "Mosquito Bits." BTi is a biological pesticide that controls gnats by destroying the larvae (worm stage).



Other Houseplant Pests

There are other indoor pests that may show up from time to time. If you notice an infestation, it is a good idea to quarantine the infested plant away from your other plants if possible. **Note: If you choose to use a pesticide spray on your plant ALWAYS test a spot before you spray the whole plant.** Some plants have more tender leaves than others and can burn. Soap sprays tend to be more likely culprits of this than horticultural oil sprays. Be sure to follow directions for dilution rates & treatment frequency--more is not better! It is also a good practice to make sure your plant is fully hydrated at the time of spray.

Aphids: These soft bodied insects are very easy to control by simply spraying them off with a strong blast of water. Repeat as needed. If that doesn't do it, step up efforts with either soap or horticultural oil sprays. Aphids can present in all different colors white, yellow, green, black, and brown.

Mealybug: A very persistent fuzzy white bug. If there are only a few or they are on a plant you can't spray, use a Q-tip dipped in rubbing alcohol to touch them individually. A horticultural oil spray is often the best control. You will have to be vigilant and re-apply according to the label. Beneficial insects such as ladybugs will eat mealybug if you are in a situation where your plant could be outside during the warm season in a protected spot and ladybugs applied.