

## What Are Fungus Gnats?

Fungus gnats (*Bradysia spp.*) are little black, mosquito-like flies that commonly inhabit old potting soil in containers, especially with houseplants. Often mistaken for fruit flies (fruit flies are only present when fruit is present), adult fungus gnats fly around the pot and prefer to lay their eggs in old, overly moist, potting soil.

Fungus gnats may appear any time of the year, but are more common when cooler weather and shorter days means plants use less water than other times of the year. Overly wet soil begins to decompose and soil fungi thrive attracting fungus gnats.

While adult fungus gnats are more of a nuisance than a threat, it's the larvae that can cause your plants to suffer. After hatching, larvae feed on the naturally occurring fungi found in the top inch or two of decomposing soil; they also feed on root tips. Later in development, larvae may feed on the inside of roots, so that even a well-watered plant may droop when the soil is heavily infested.

Sticky traps aid in catching adult fungus gnats. For larvae, parasitic nematodes, soil drenches with insecticidal soap, as well as strains of microbial insecticides, like *Bacillus thuringiensis*, have been shown to control populations.

But often *the best remedy is simply just to repot your plant*. If the soil has reached a such state that the fungus gnats like it, your plant likely would benefit from a fresh repotting anyway. These days I like the "Recipe 420" brand potting soil for almost any container plants. It's a versatile, well-draining, potting media great for houseplants, flowers, hanging baskets, veggies herbs, and more; find it at Walter Andersen Nursery.