

# Cluster Flies

A number of species of flies will congregate in large numbers, inside buildings, in winter to hibernate. Cluster Flies can be found across the UK, often invading historic and older houses, particularly those in rural areas. They cause low level damage, but if populations of these insects are allowed to build up, they can pose a nuisance and become a cause for serious concern. Three species may be troublesome. The Common Cluster Fly (*Pollenia rudis*) is the most frequently encountered but the Green Cluster Fly (*Eudasyphora cyanella*) and the Autumn Fly (*Musca autumnalis*) may also appear.



*Pollenia rudi*  
Common Cluster Fly



*Eudasyphora cyanella*  
Green Cluster Fly



*Musca autumnalis*  
Autumn Fly

## Identification

The Common Cluster Fly is about the same size as a housefly (10-15mm) with a sluggish manner, large, reddish eyes and a thorax with yellow-gold hairs. It has a habit of folding its wings over its back when resting. The Green Cluster Fly has similar habits and looks like a greenbottle fly (*Lucilia species*). The Autumn Fly, also known as the Face fly is a pest of cattle and horses, has a striped thorax and orange patches on the abdomen.

## Biology

*Pollenia* lay eggs outside in grass and leaf litter in the Spring, the hatching larvae then parasitise earthworms and develop within their bodies. They pupate in the soil and the emerging adult flies feed on nectar of flowers. In warm weather, up to four generations of flies may be produced. *Eudasyphora cyanella* and *Musca autumnalis* larvae develop in cow and animal dung. None reproduce indoors.

Cluster Flies become a problem in late Summer and Autumn, when large number of flies are attracted to warm south and west facing walls of buildings. They then enter buildings to hibernate. As the weather cools, they will push through the tiniest of cracks around windows, between roof slates or other gaps in the building to form large, clustering masses inside loft areas, pelmets, cornices etc. These clusters often give off a sickly-sweet smell. They will find their way into attic spaces, lofts, and typically upstairs rooms.

Sash windows are often poorly sealed and are a frequent point of entry. On warm winter days, or if heating is switched on over the winter period, and with the arrival of Spring, the flies wake up and fly around, accumulating in window areas as they try to return to the outside. Often only certain buildings or rooms will be affected but problems can reoccur and rooms can be invaded, year after year.

## Damage

Cluster flies are primarily a nuisance insect when they invade the living areas of buildings, but if a large number of dead flies accumulate these can provide food for other secondary pests. Some carpet beetle infestations in historic collections have been shown to originate in cluster fly debris where they have not been cleaned up regularly.






### Control Strategies


As cluster flies develop in the surrounding pasture and open countryside and may even fly half a mile (800m or more) to hibernate; controlling the source is impossible. Managing manure heaps will help.

### Housekeeping and Building Management


Managing Cluster Fly infestations consists of a mix of exclusion, deterrence, trapping and room treatments. Treating for Cluster Flies depends very much on the level of the problem. Large accumulations may need professional treatment, but self-treatment is also possible. There is no recognised attractant. Where cluster flies are found inside a building, vacuuming them up (small hand-held machines are ideal) and destroying the bag (or removing the contents from the building) is often effective for small numbers. Where possible clean any location where flies congregate as they can leave a scent that they detect when returning in subsequent years.

1. **Exclusion:** Prevent access into the building. Their points of entry should be identified and building proofing measures implemented. If practical, seal windows and cracks with mastics and foam and underline roof slates to deny access.
2. **Deterrence:** Clean all surfaces around window frames to remove any fly scent on places where flies land or accumulate. Areas such as internal and external walls, can be sprayed with a residual insecticide like Constrain to kill landing flies before they enter the building or as they alight around window frames. Repeat applications will be needed externally.
 
3. **Trapping:** Window Fly Stickers. A sticky, non-marking, clear glue trap. These will catch nuisance flies gathering around windows. Once a few individuals are caught, more are attracted to the trap. Placement at a low level helps to catch and deflect flies onto the glue surface as they pass. Each pack contains 10 traps.
 
4. **Room Treatments.** Protector Natural Total Release Aerosols are room foggers that contain natural pyrethrins. These cause rapid knockdown and death of flies without leaving any residues. Close external doors and windows, activate can and depart. Leave for 2 hours and ventilate for at least 30mins before re-entering. The 150ml can treats 150m<sup>3</sup> and 530ml can treats 450m<sup>3</sup>. Dead flies will need to be collected.
 

**Automatic Room Sprays:** Battery powered, timed, automatic dispensers for use in unoccupied spaces such as storage rooms and roof voids where Cluster Flies collect. A 250ml cannister can deliver 3000 doses. Product can be dispensed at set intervals. The LED operates 24 hours at 7.5, 15 and 30 minutes with night and day options. The LCD sprays at 1 to 60 minute intervals at any set hours. Each can has an in-use-life of up to 125 days and treats an space up to 170m<sup>3</sup>. Dead flies will need to be collected.



**Void Treatments:** The Insectosec range a natural powder which acts on the cuticle of any insect it contacts. The outer, protective waxy coating of the fly is disrupted, and the insect dehydrates and dies. It is ideal for long term residual treatment in voids and cavities, such as sash window frames, where flies gather. Available as 200g Puffer or 500ml Aerosol.



**Before treatment, it is vital to check if there is any evidence of bats. It is an offense to disturb roosting bats.**