

**Fungus Gnats on the Loose**  
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During the days that follow Thanksgiving people get busy decorating for Christmas, watching football, shopping for deals, or just taking it easy. I myself spent the weekend with family back in Fargo. Upon returning to Rapid City I noticed several small specks on the bottom of my bathtub. Taking a closer look I realized these specks were dead fungus gnats.

Adult fungus gnats are about 1/8 to 1/10 inch long, grayish to black, have one pair of wings, and look like a tiny mosquito. Fungus gnats do not bite as other gnats do. Larvae are a maggot which is thread like, legless, 1/4 inch long and transparent. These insects are very adapted to living indoors, especially if overwatered houseplants are nearby. They prefer moist, shaded soils high in organic matter, which is what a lot of houseplants have. Adult females can lay up to 300 eggs in batches of 2 to 30 each in decaying organic matter. The eggs will hatch in about five days and the larvae feed for 12 to 14 days and then pupate for 5 or 6 days. Indoors there can be many generations per year.

Most fungus gnat problems indoors are a result of having houseplants that are kept to wet. However, one lady that visited my office indicated that she does not have any houseplants. She said that she has found them in the bathroom concentrated around a broken piece of molding surrounding her bathtub. Fungus gnats will reproduce in drains and other areas where organic matter is available for fungal growth as well as in soil. Larvae feed on fungi and will attack root tips of plants. They can cause some damage to otherwise healthy houseplants.

If you notice small black insects hovering around lights, your television, or computer screen you probably have fungus gnats. A few tips to keep these pesky pests in check include; inspecting new houseplants for signs of infestation, allowing houseplant soil to dry between watering, and by practicing good sanitation by removing old plant material and debris around the home. Chemical control methods include using pyrethrins or aerosols labeled for flying insects or gnats. To reduce numbers of larvae without using chemicals try placing slices of potato on the soil surface of houseplants. The larvae will be attracted to the potato and burrow into it. After five days throw the slice away and the larvae will go with it.

If fungus gnats are noticed around the drains in your home than simply pour some bleach into the trap. Let the bleach set in the trap for an hour or so and run cold water down the drain. This should kill any larva and eggs that are in the drain. Be sure to NOT allow ammonia into the drain while the bleach is present as this can cause a deadly gas to emerge.

For verification of fungus gnats or other questions involving horticulture or household insects feel free to call on me at 605-394-2188 or email to [ricky.abrahamson@sdsu.edu](mailto:ricky.abrahamson@sdsu.edu). If you bring in sample remember it must be in a sealed container. We are located at 601 E. Centre Street in Rapid City.