



March Tip of the Month Fungus Gnats

Fungus gnats are those tiny, hopping, mosquito looking like bugs that you see when you water your indoor plants! They are about 1/8" in length with gray or black bodies and clear wings. Generally you will notice them darting about in new seedlings and in plants grown under cover. Due to the fact that they are relatively weak fliers, they generally remain near potted plants, often running or resting on soil or leaves.

The larvae feed on dead roots and leaves and consume tender new roots at times, which is why it's important to keep your plants clean of fallen leaves and debris. Their feeding stresses the plants which allows for disease pathogens to enter so if you have a sick plant, fungus gnats can spread it to all of your healthy plants! Usually the first sign of this happening is when you see your plant wilting, followed by a gradual decline of the plant.

Typically fungus gnats appear for one of two reasons: either by over watering your plants, as they love damp soil; or from other plants. Be sure not to over water and always check plants prior to purchasing them. In addition to feeding on plant roots, fungus gnat larva will consume organic material in the soil. Avoid potting mixes containing fresh compost, which attracts the larva from its high microbial activity. Use a well draining potting mix stored indoors to avoid moist soil.

So, how do I get rid of these annoying little critters you ask? Well, there are several things you can try. The color yellow seems to be attractive to them, so you can purchase yellow sticky cards, which are small yellow cards with sticky adhesive on both sides, which often does the trick. You can also try some remedies with items already in your home. Try placing about ¼ to ½ cup of apple cider vinegar in a small glass or bowl mixed with several drops of dish detergent, or leave a cup of coffee with cream and sugar next to the plant for a few days. Another thing you can try is put slices of potato on top of the soil for several days, being careful not to let the potato dry out, and once the gnats have infested the potato, throw them out. Lastly, over the counter gnat or "flying insect" sprays are effective against adult fungus gnats, particularly those containing pyrethrins, however, multiple applications may be necessary.

Although a fungus gnat outbreak can cause quite a headache, they can be easily controlled by watering your plants properly and treating the pests once you've discovered them in the soil.