

I seem to have a lot of fruit flies in my garden, especially late in the year. Is there anything at all I can do about them?

Fruit flies, also known as vinegar flies, are a very common pest in strawberries, caneberries and many other fruit. When thinking about how to manage these pests in the garden, it is first important to know that in Santa Cruz County there are two species of vinegar flies; one species which is attracted to rotten and overripe fruit, and another which infests fruit not yet fully mature. Since both species are known by their common name of “vinegar fly” without distinguishing between the two, the scientific names of each one will be referred to in this article.

The species attracted to rotten and overripe fruit and most common in our area is the vinegar fly *Drosophila melanogaster*. Females will lay around 25 eggs per day and up to 700 eggs in her 25 to 30 day life span. When the weather is warm, above 80 degrees Fahrenheit, a single generation may fully develop in less than a week. In contrast, the cooler temperatures in the winter delay development substantially, and the life cycle may take up to 70 days. Note however, that fruit flies are still active in the winter, but it takes them longer to develop. Very high temperatures above 100 degrees even for a few minutes will kill adults.

Fruit flies infesting rotten and overripe fruit are rather easy to manage, since removal of the rotten and overripe fruit from the garden or field will remove the food source for these flies and result in their departure.

The second species of vinegar fly, *Drosophila biarmipes*, has been recently observed in larger numbers in Santa Cruz County, and bears watching because it is infesting fruit not yet fully mature. While the life cycle is not yet well known, quite probably it is very similar to its relative *Drosophila melanogaster*. Since removal of overripe and rotten fruit will have little effect on the populations of this vinegar fly, use of pesticides may be warranted. Most pesticides available to home gardeners should have an effect on the adults of this fly, and repeated applications over regular periods should result in control of infestations of this vinegar fly.

The above has been a brief guide to managing vinegar flies in gardens and fields. Please contact Mark Bolda at UCCE Santa Cruz if you have more questions on this topic or any other topics concerning blackberry, raspberry or strawberry production.

There are pesticides mentioned in this article. Before using any pesticides, consult product labels for current status of product registration, restrictions, and use information.