



Fly, Fly Away

Flies belong to the Order Diptera, insects with only two wings. The Order also includes midges, gnats, craneflies and mosquitoes.

Flies have complete metamorphosis, consisting of egg, larva (usually maggot-like), pupa and adult. Some have nasty habits - feeding on garbage, dead animals, some are parasitic, and a few even live in strong salt water (Mono Lake shore flies) or feed on oil seeps around oil wells.

The mouthparts of flies and their relatives vary greatly, which explains their diversity of feeding and living habits. Some have sponging mouthparts and can only feed on liquid food. To dissolve solid food, they "spit" on the material before they sop it up. This habit makes us disgusted at flies because of all the germs they can transmit this way and by the filth with which they come in contact. Other flies have biting mouthparts. Stable flies have a sharp proboscis for feeding on the blood of horses and cows. Tabanids (deerflies and horseflies) have slashing/lapping mouthparts. They slash their victims with saber-like mandibles and then lap up the blood that is released.

The common house fly is perhaps the most despised because of the unsavory habit of landing on our food. "Don't touch that fly, you don't know where it's been!" is probably an understatement, since we know they can carry many types of germs on their bodies. Houseflies love garbage, and will feed on anything they can dissolve with their saliva. EEEWWWW!!!

Syrphid, or flower flies are much more pleasant fellows. The adults feed on the nectar of flowers and resemble bees, wasps and hornets. This gives them the protection of mimicry that they require as they feed. It is the larvae that are a real benefit to the gardener. They feed on aphids and other insects, have a voracious appetite and should be encouraged to remain in your garden. Most of the Syrphid larvae are light green with a golden stripe down their backs. If you see a maggot-like critter on your roses amongst the aphids that fits this description, please leave him there and let him feast. He is doing you a favor!

Flies may not be the most pleasant creatures to have around, but they have been helpful to us in a number of ways. The initial study of a genetic makeup was done using fruit flies, fly life stages have been used to solve homicides (forensic evidence), they serve as food for a multitude of other animals and they are ultimate garbage cleanup professionals on our planet.

Of course, I use a fly swatter as often as possible.

