

Nail it! – How to attack a fruit fly infestation in your Worm Farm

Fruit flies are a nuisance! Small tiny winged creatures can take over a bin and multiply quickly if not treated immediately. Fortunately these flies do not pose a threat to the worms or their operation in recycling organic waste – but they are a major inconvenience to the operator, and if close to a doorway, fruit fly can invade your home.



Do not smile when entering the worm farm, or you may find your teeth spotted!

Fruit flies thrive in an environment where they have direct access to the waste: where no blanket covers the food waste, or the blanket is really moist, old or full of holes, and where liquid juice is on the inner sides. Often flies start to be a problem after the lid has been left ajar, and/or the waste is uncovered.

In container worm farms, check that the liquids are being removed regularly. Also consider the smell – a healthy worm farm should not smell foul. Giving the bedding a good stir-up with handfuls of lime and a bit of soil or peat can help this situation.

Young worm farms are more vulnerable to fruit fly, because the system has not developed a robust bacterial environment. Fruit fly can also develop if the worm farm is being overfed. Once mature and in balance, the worm farm will be more resistant to fruit fly.

A piece of wool carpet (a worm blanket) is a great tool to prevent and treat fruit fly.

The basic concepts to attack an infestation of fruit fly are: drown them, suffocate future generations (adults and eggs), remove their food supply, and change the pH.

Here's how I treat a fruit fly infestation:

1. Hose down the bin, inside and out, removing as much of the liquid juices on the sides that may be attracting flies. This will also drown a few, and reduce the number of flyers.
2. Evaluate your blanket (carpet top) – is it breaking down, is it full of holes, does it need Replacing? If so, incorporate the old blanket as a layer in the worm bin by feeding on top.
3. Pull back the blanket and use your gloved hand or a fluffing fork to rough up the top 3 inches. You should see worms. If you don't, you may also have smells & pockets of no air.
4. Add 3-4 handfuls of garden lime (calcium carbonate, not dolomite) to the surface and water in. Don't worry about the worms – the powder on their skin will soon disappear.

5. Add strips of dry paper if the worm bed is smelly and smeary wet – if a handful of worm bedding drips water when you hold it up in the air, it's too wet and needs bulking material like dry paper, cardboard or peat.
6. Add 3 inches of soil – about 10 litres. Put on top of the old blanket if replacing.
7. If the blanket is in good shape, keep it instead of incorporating it into the system. Do this by peeling the blanket to the side and adding soil to the top of the waste layer, then fold blanket back over the soil to cover the soil layer. In general, the dryer the blanket, the less attractive it is to flies and the longer it will last as an effective blanket. **Replace blanket regularly.**
8. Cover the entire top now with a piece of thick plastic – An old bag will due, woven polyethylene or something that will not breakdown and does not have holes.
9. Replace the lid, and do not feed *or open* for two weeks. When you return to feeding, remove the plastic, peel back the blanket/carpet and feed as per normal. Keep the carpet moist during the summer months to slow down evaporation from the worm bed and deter flies.
10. You can use fly spray to zap the flies congregating on the outside. I don't know if the spray will cause damage to the worms – makes sense that it would, right? So avoid spraying fly spray directly on the worm bed. Dead bodies should be shaken off and not incorporated back into the worm farm.

Okay, patience is the key to success here. Wait the two weeks before checking on the system, then when you return to normal feeding, watch for the flies. If they start to come back, make sure the system is covered up tight with the blanket and keep on top of any imbalances.

Feel free to contact me if you need any help, or if this approach does not seem to help. She'll be right!

Many thanks, and happy recycling!