NIC'S BUG OF THE MONTH FUNGUS GNATS

BIOLOGICAL CONTROLS COMING NEXT POST

FUNGUS GNATS, THE INVISIBLE INVADERS IN YOUR GREENHOUSE, OFFICE, AND HOME: IDENTIFICATION, DAMAGE, AND ECO-FRIENDLY CONTROL

Fungus gnats are small, mosquito-like flies commonly found in homes, greenhouses, and offices. Adult fungus gnats measure between 2-8 mm long and have a slender body, long legs, and antennae. They are typically grayish-black in color with a distinct "Y-shaped" pattern on their forewings. These gnats are weak fliers, often seen running rapidly over plants and soil rather than flying.

The larvae, or maggots, are about 5.5 mm long when mature and have shiny black head capsules with elongated, whitish to transparent bodies. They live in the growing medium, where they feed on plant roots, fungi, and algae, potentially causing harm to plants.

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DAMAGE CAUSED BY FUNGUS GNATS

- Adult gnats: While they don't directly damage plants, they can be a nuisance in large numbers.

- Larvae: Feed on plant roots, which can lead to:
  - Stunted plant growth
  - Yellowing and wilting of foliage
  - Increased susceptibility to microbial infections, particularly in seedlings and young plants.

MANUAL CONTROL METHODS

- **Moisture Management:** Fungus gnats thrive in moist conditions, so avoid overwatering your plants.

- **Soil Management:**
  - Use potting mixes with less peat moss and more bark, as these are less conducive to fungus gnat larvae.
  - Consider placing a layer of sand, pebbles, or indoor mulch on top of the soil to deter egg-laying.

- **Monitoring:**
  - Place yellow sticky cards near the surface of the soil or attach them to stakes to capture adult gnats.
  - Insert potato slices into the growing medium to attract and monitor larvae. Replace the slices regularly.

- **Cultural Practices:**
  - Eliminate damp areas under benches or other places where gnats can breed.
  - Use decoy pots with sprouting grain to attract egg-laying females, then discard the contents every two weeks.

- **Drying Method:** Allow the top 2 inches of soil to dry out between waterings, as fungus gnats prefer consistently moist environments.

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