

# SWAT!

**Canadian cities once held contests for kids to kill as many flies as possible.**

In the early 1900s, parts of Canadian cities and towns were paradise for flies. Ordinary houseflies landed on the garbage and horse manure in the streets and then carried deadly diseases into people's homes. That's how they got the nickname **germs with legs**. In 1912, Edmonton, Hamilton, Toronto, Montreal and other cities all over North America held contests for kids under 16, with prize money for those who killed the most flies. The kids kept the flies they killed in containers.

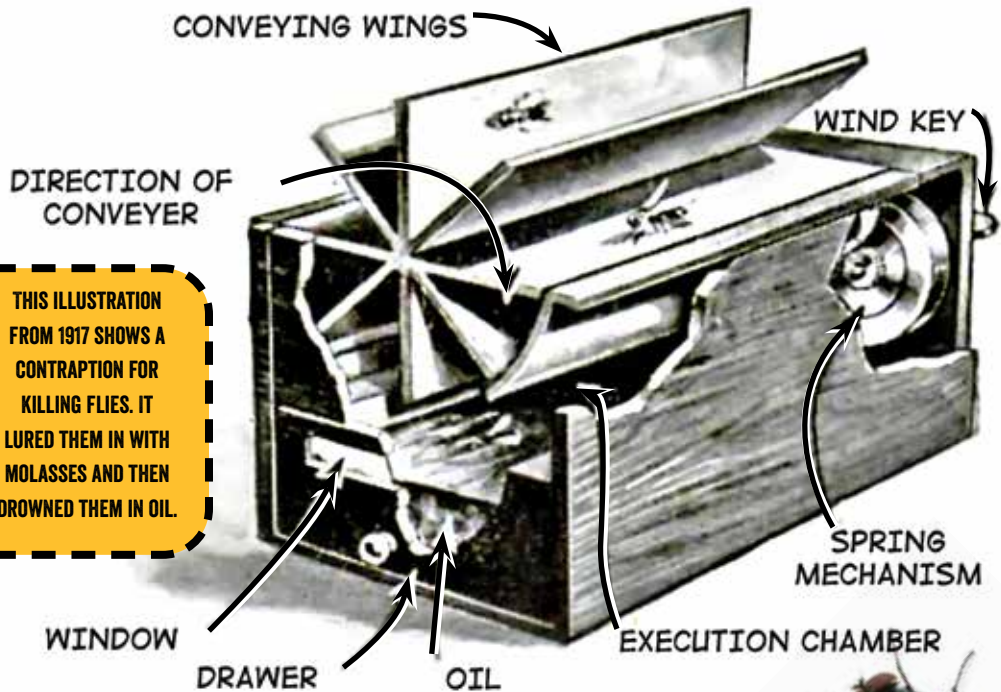
In Toronto, the health official in charge of counting scooped out dead flies by the glassful — he figured the glass held about 3,200 flies. At first, kids just used their hands or a fly-swatter. Many soon started setting traps with things like beef liver as bait.



**TORONTO'S BEATRICE WHITE, 15, KILLED HALF A MILLION FLIES (543,360 TO BE EXACT) DURING A SIX-WEEK CONTEST IN THE SUMMER OF 1912. HER SISTER MILDRED CAME IN SECOND THE NEXT YEAR. BEATRICE WON \$50 (ABOUT \$2,600 TODAY). SHE'D HOPED TO USE IT FOR MUSIC LESSONS, BUT LATER IN LIFE SAID HER DAD HAD TAKEN AND SPENT IT HIMSELF.**

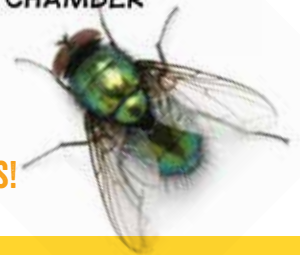


Toronto Star



THIS ILLUSTRATION FROM 1917 SHOWS A CONTRAPTION FOR KILLING FLIES. IT LURED THEM IN WITH MOLASSES AND THEN DROWNED THEM IN OIL.

**IN MONTREAL, A THOUSAND KIDS TAKING PART IN THE CONTEST MANAGED TO SWAT 25 MILLION HOUSEFLIES!**



**AROUND THE TIME OF THE FLY-SWATTING CONTEST, THE NEWSPAPERS SAID SOME PRETTY WILD THINGS ABOUT THESE INSECTS. THEY ALSO DIDN'T MENTION (OR DIDN'T KNOW) THAT FLIES ARE PART OF THE FOOD CHAIN FOR OTHER ANIMALS.**

**"FLIES ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR MOST OF THE DISEASE OF CHILDREN. FLIES ARE WHOLESALE MURDERERS. WHY SHOULD THEY BE TOLERATED?"**

**-TORONTO STAR, JULY 1912**



**N**orton Whittaker, a health inspector in eastern Ontario, wanted people to stop giving houseflies a place to breed. So in 1961, he started the Golden Garbage Can award. Every week he awarded the prize to someone who had really scrubbed out their garbage cans well. His idea was copied in the United States and Europe.

