



Spiders

Integrated Pest Management for Home Gardeners and Landscape Professionals

Many people fear or dislike spiders (Figure 1) but for the most part, spiders are beneficial because of their role as predators of insects and other arthropods, and most cannot harm people. Spiders that might injure people—for example, black widows—generally spend most of their time hidden outside homes in woodpiles or in clutter in the garage. The spiders commonly seen out in the open during the day are unlikely to bite people.

IDENTIFICATION

Spiders resemble insects and sometimes are confused with them, but they are arachnids, not insects. Spiders have 8 legs and 2 body parts—a head region (cephalothorax) and an abdomen. They lack wings and antennae. Common spider families are described in Table 1.

Most spiders have venom which they use to kill their prey. However, only those spiders whose venom typically causes a serious reaction in humans are called “toxic” spiders. See SPIDER BITES (below).

Black Widow Spider

The black widow spider, *Latrodectus hesperus* (Figure 2), is the most common harmful spider in California. Venom from its bite can cause reactions ranging from mild to painful and serious, but death is very unlikely and many symptoms can be alleviated if medical treatment is obtained. Anyone bitten by this spider should remain calm and promptly seek medical advice. It is helpful if the offending spider can be caught and saved for identification by an arachnologist.

The typical adult female black widow has a shiny black body, slender black legs, and a red or orange mark in the shape of an hourglass on the underside of the large, round abdomen (Figure 2). In contrast, immature and male western black widows have white stripes on a tan abdomen and



Figure 1. Wolf spiders are typically marked with tan and brown coloration. They have two large “headlight” eyes in front with 4 smaller eyes just below. The fourth pair of eyes are further back and not readily visible in this image.



Figure 2. Adult female Western black widow spider, *Latrodectus hesperus*.

look very different from the adult females. Only the larger immature female and adult female spiders are able to bite through a person’s skin and inject enough venom to cause a painful reaction.

The adult male black widow is one-half to two-thirds the length of the female, has a small abdomen, and is seldom noticed. The male black widow does possess venom, but its fangs are too small to break human skin.

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Originally compiled from Barr BA et al. 1984. *Spiders*. UC ANR Leaflet 2531. Oakland, CA. Out of print.

Contrary to popular belief, the female black widow rarely eats the male after mating but may do so if hungry.

The web of the black widow is an irregular, tough-stranded, sticky cobweb mesh in which the spider hangs with its underside up, showing the red hourglass. The egg sacs are mostly spherical, about ½ inch long and ½ inch in diameter, creamy yellow to light tan in color, opaque, and tough and paperlike on the surface.

Black widow spiders occur in most parts of California. They and their associated webs usually are found in dark, dry, sheltered, relatively undisturbed places. People are most likely to be bitten when they disturb the spider while they are cleaning out or picking up items in such places. The symptoms of a black widow bite are largely internal; little more than local redness and swelling may develop at the bite site. The internal effects may range from mild to severe. Small children, the elderly, and persons with health problems are likely to suffer some of the more severe consequences of the bite. Black widow bites are fairly common in California.

For more information about black widows, see the *Pest Notes: Widow Spiders and Their Relatives*.

Yellow Sac Spider

The common, house-dwelling yellow sac spider, *Cheiracanthium mildei*, is a small spider that spins a silken sac web in the corners of ceilings and walls, and behind shelves and pictures; it is also commonly found outdoors in shrubbery.

This spider is light yellow and has a slightly darker stripe on the upper middle of the abdomen (Figure 3). The 8 eyes of this spider are all about equal in size and arranged in 2 horizontal rows (Figure 4).

Yellow sac spiders can be seen running on walls and ceilings at night and quickly drop to the floor to escape if they are disturbed. Bites usually occur

when the spider becomes trapped against a person's skin in clothing or bedding. Typical symptoms of a bite include initial pain similar to a bee sting, redness, and sometimes swelling.

Recluse Spiders

Recluse spiders of the genus *Loxosceles* include the well-known brown recluse spider, *L. reclusa*, which does not occur in California. While the brown recluse has occasionally been brought into California in household furnishings, firewood, and motor vehicles, there are no breeding populations in the state. Related native recluse species are found in California's southeastern deserts.

Recluse spiders can have a violin-shaped mark (with the neck of the violin pointing backward) on the top side of the head region (cephalothorax). However, the mark is not always distinct, so it should not be used as an identifying character. A more diagnostic feature of recluse spiders is their 6 eyes, arranged in pairs in a semicircle (Figure 4), which can be seen with the use of a good hand lens. Most other spiders have 8 eyes.

More detailed information on these spiders is available in *Pest Notes: Brown Recluse and Other Recluse Spiders*, listed in the References section.

Other Spiders

In addition to the species mentioned above, there are only a few other species of spiders in California that may on occasion bite humans. (Remember, if the bite of any spider causes an unusual or severe reaction, contact a physician).

One kind of **red and black jumping spider**, *Phidippus johnsoni*, may bite if it is disturbed, but the bites are usually not serious. The female spiders are black with red on the top side of the abdomen whereas the males have a black cephalothorax with an all red



Figure 3. Adult yellow sac spider, *Cheiracanthium mildei*.

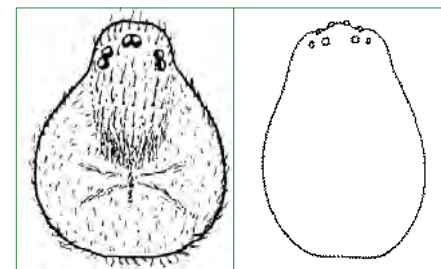


Figure 4. Head region of recluse spider (left) and yellow sac spider (right). Note the arrangements of the eyes: the recluse spider has 6 eyes arranged in 3 pairs and the yellow sac spider has 8 eyes arranged in 2 rows of 4.

abdomen. These spiders range in size from ¼ to ½ inch long.

Tarantulas are long-lived spiders that occupy burrows in the ground during the day but wait at their burrow entrance at night to prey on insects passing near the burrow. They commonly are feared because of their large size and hairy appearance. These spiders range from 1 to 2 inches in body size. Some tarantulas that occur in tropical parts of the world have bites toxic for humans, but the bites of California tarantulas are not likely to be serious—at worst, they are similar to a bee sting. However, because of the variety of tarantulas sold in the pet trade industry, there is a spectrum of venom potencies among these creatures.

The **hobo spider**, *Eratigena agrestis*, is a common spider in the northwestern United States and British Columbia. It builds webs in dark, moist areas such

as basements, window wells, wood piles, under driftwood, and around the perimeter of homes. It is a large (1 to 1 ¼ inch, including legs), fast-running brown spider with a herringbone or multiple chevron pattern on the top of the abdomen. The hobo spider has not been documented in California, but it has expanded its range from the Pacific Northwest to northern Utah, Wyoming, and Colorado. Although it has been stated as being a toxic spider, recent research is challenging the original data that elevated this spider to medical importance. See *Pest Notes: Hobo Spider*, listed in the References section.

One spider frequently found indoors is the **common house spider**, *Parasteatoda tepidariorum* (Figure 5), which makes a cobweb in corners of rooms, in windows, and in similar places. Another is the **marbled cellar spider**, *Holocnemus pluchei*, which was introduced into the state in the 1970s and has since displaced the once common **longbodied cellar spider**, *Pholcus phalangioides* (Figure 6), a long-legged spider that resembles a daddy-longlegs. These spiders are only marginally capable of biting humans because their fangs are too short to pierce people's skin in most cases; they primarily cause problems by producing messy cobwebs.

Various kinds of small hunting spiders may wander indoors and occasionally, rather large, hunting-type spiders are discovered in homes or garages. Often these are fully grown wolf spider or tarantula males that have reached maturity and are searching for females. When these spiders are wandering, one or more may accidentally get indoors. New houses and other structures in developments may be invaded by wolf spiders that have lost their usual outdoor living places. The more insects that exist inside a building, the more likely it is to have spiders living there. Immature and adult female burrow-living spiders sometimes wander for a time during the rainy season if they have had to abandon wet burrows.

Table 1. Common spider families in North America.





<p>Agelenidae, funnel weavers or grass spiders</p> <p>Sit-and-wait predators feed during the day and night near the ground in most types of vegetation, including low-growing plants and trees. Spin funnel-shaped webs, often with several-inch-wide, flat extension covering plants or soil. The spider waits in the hole of its web. When it detects vibrations from an insect that flew or walked into the web, the spider runs out, captures and bites the prey, then carries it back into the funnel to be eaten. Webs on low vegetation become conspicuous in morning light after collecting dew. Funnel weavers have 6 or 8 eyes, all about the same size, arranged in 2 rows. About 300 species in North America.</p>	
<p>Araneidae, orb weavers or garden spiders</p> <p>Feed on insects that fly, fall, or are blown into web. Elaborate silken webs are spun in concentric circles. Spiderlings often make symmetrical webs; mature spiders may spin a more specialized design that is helpful in identifying certain species. The spider rests at the center of its web or hides in a shelter near the edge, waiting for prey to become entangled. Orb weavers generally have poor vision and rely on web vibrations to locate and identify prey. About 200 species in North America.</p>	
<p>Clubionidae (including Corinnidae), sac spiders or twoclawed hunting spiders</p> <p>Stalk and capture prey that is walking or resting on surfaces. They spin silken tubes or sacs under bark, among leaves, and in low plants or on the ground, where they hide during the day or retreat after hunting. Commonly are nocturnal, medium-sized, pale spiders with few markings. About 200 species in North America.</p>	
<p>Linyphiidae, dwarf or money spiders</p> <p>Prey on insects that fall, walk, or land in their web. Diurnal (day active) spiders occurring in the plant canopy and among litter on the ground. They produce sheetlike webs on the surface of plants or soil and are common in some field and vegetable crops. Most are relatively small. Several hundred species in North America.</p>	

Table 1. Common spider families in North America (continued).**Lycosidae, wolf spiders**

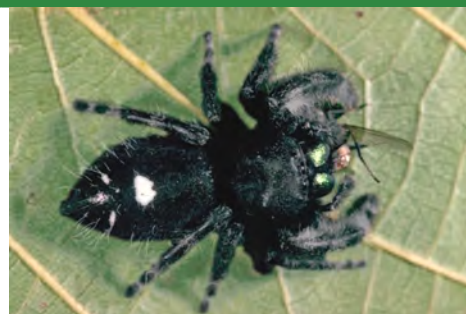
Prey on insects that are walking or resting on the ground. Actively hunt in the open during the day and night, often observed on the ground in litter and on low vegetation. Can occur in burrows and under debris on soil. Instead of spinning webs to catch prey, make a small, thick web where they rest. Have a distinctive pattern of eyes: 4 small eyes in front in a straight row, one middle pair of larger eyes, and one rear pair of widely spaced eyes on top of the head. They have long hairy legs. They are usually brown to tan, some with black markings, which can make them difficult to discern unless they are moving. They can be found at night by using a flashlight; their eyes reflect green. About 200 species in North America.

**Oxyopidae, lynx spiders**

Stalk and capture resting or walking insects. Active hunters with good vision. Most have spiny legs and a brightly colored body that tapers sharply toward the rear. They have 4 pairs of eyes, three pairs of which are grouped in a hexagon. About 2 dozen known species in North America.

**Salticidae, jumping spiders**

Day-active hunters in plants or on the ground. They make no web; instead they stalk and pounce on prey by jumping distances many times their body length. Jumping spiders have a distinctive pattern of eyes in three rows: the first row of four eyes, with large and distinctive middle eyes; a second row of two very small to minute eyes; and a third row of two medium sized pairs of eyes. They can have an iridescent, metallic-colored abdomen and black carapace. About 300 species in North America.

**Theridiidae, cobweb, cobweb weaver, or combfooted spiders**

Feed on insects that walk or fly into their webs. Almost always found hanging upside down by their claws in irregularly spun, sticky webs, waiting for prey. The spider is usually concealed in a corner of the web, in a silken tent, or behind debris. This group includes the black widow spider, which produces relatively thick silk that feels rough and sticky. They generally have a soft, round, bulbous abdomen and slender legs without spines. Over 200 species in North America.

**Thomisidae, crab spiders or flower spiders, crab spiders or flower spiders**

Stalk and capture insects walking or resting on surfaces. Diurnal hunters that do not spin webs. Front 2 pairs of legs are enlarged and extend beyond the side of their flattened body, making them look like tiny crabs. Their small eyes occur in 2 slightly curved rows, with the top row often much wider than the lower row. Over 200 species in North America.



MANAGEMENT

Remember that spiders are primarily beneficial, and their activities should be encouraged in the garden. Pesticide control is difficult and rarely necessary. The best approach to controlling spiders in and around the home is to remove hiding spots for secretive spiders such as black widows and regularly clean webs off the house with brushes and vacuums.

Prevention and Nonchemical Control

Spiders may enter houses and other structures through cracks and other openings. They also may be carried in on items like plants, firewood, and boxes. To prevent spiders from coming indoors, seal cracks in the foundation and other parts of the structure and gaps around windows and doors. Good screening not only will keep out many spiders but also will discourage them by keeping out insects that they prey upon.

Regular vacuuming or sweeping of windows, corners of rooms, storage areas, basements, and other seldom used areas helps remove spiders and their webs. Vacuuming spiders can be an effective control technique because their soft bodies usually do not survive the tumbling process through the hose. Indoors, a web on which dust has gathered is an old web that is no longer being used by a spider because occupied spider webs are maintained for cleanliness to enhance prey capture.

Individual spiders can also be removed from indoor areas by placing a jar over them and slipping a piece of paper under the jar that then seals off the opening of the jar when it is lifted up. They can then be released outdoors. Watch this video to learn more: [How to catch a spider](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eUEcFamxr0) www.youtube.com/watch?v=eUEcFamxr0.

In indoor storage areas, place boxes off the floor and away from walls, whenever possible, to help reduce their usefulness as a harborage for

spiders. Sealing the boxes with tape will prevent spiders from taking up residence within. Clean up clutter in garages, sheds, basements, and other storage areas. Be sure to wear gloves to avoid accidental bites.

Outdoors, eliminate places for spiders to hide and build their webs by keeping the area next to the foundation free of trash, leaf litter, heavy vegetation, and other accumulations of materials. Trimming plant growth away from the house and other structures will discourage spiders from first taking up residence near the structure and then moving indoors. Outdoor lighting attracts insects, which in turn attracts spiders. If possible, keep lighting fixtures off structures and away from windows and doorways. Sweep, mop, hose, or vacuum webs and spiders off buildings regularly.

Chemical Control

Insecticides will not provide long-term control and should not generally be used against spiders outdoors. Typically, controlling spiders with pesticides is difficult unless you actually see the spider and are able to spray it. There are various insecticides available in retail outlets labeled for spider control, including pyrethrins and pyrethroids (synthetic versions of pyrethrins) such as resmethrin, allethrin, or combinations of these products. Control by spraying is only temporary unless accompanied by housekeeping. It is just as easy and much less toxic to crush the spider with a rolled up newspaper or your shoe or to vacuum it up. Sticky traps offer a noninsecticidal way to remove spiders from your home as long as you can place the traps where pets and children can't tamper with them.

Sorptive dusts containing amorphous silica gel (silica aerogel) and pyrethrins, which can be applied by professional pest control applicators only, may be useful in certain indoor situations. Sorptive dust particles affect the outer covering of spiders (and also insects) that have crawled over a treated surface, causing them to dry

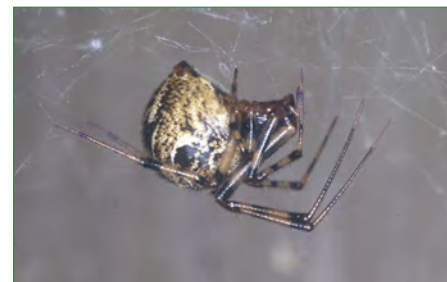


Figure 5. Adult common house spider, *Parasteatoda tepidariorum*.



Figure 6. Marbled cellar spider, *Holocnemus pluchei*.

out and die. When applied as a dust-like film and left in place, a sorptive dust provides permanent protection against spiders. The dust is most safely and effectively used in cracks and crevices and in attics, wall voids, and other enclosed or unused places.

SPIDER BITES

Unlike mosquitoes, spiders do not seek people in order to bite them. Generally, a spider doesn't try to bite a person unless it has been squeezed, lain on, or similarly provoked to defend itself. Moreover, the jaws of most spiders are so small that the fangs cannot penetrate the skin of an adult person. Sometimes when a spider is disturbed in its web, it may bite instinctively because it mistakenly senses that an insect has been caught.

The severity of a spider bite depends on factors such as the kind of spider, the amount of venom injected, and the age and health of the person bitten. A spider bite might cause no

reaction at all, or it might result in varying amounts of itching, redness, stiffness, swelling, and pain—at worst, usually no more severe than a bee sting. Typically, the symptoms persist from a few minutes to a few hours. Like reactions to bee stings, however, people vary in their responses to spider bites, so if the bite of any spider causes an unusual or severe reaction, such as increasing pain or extreme swelling, contact a physician, hospital, or poison control center (in California, the number is 1-800-876-4766 or 1-800-8-POISON). One must also keep in mind that although it is impossible to be certain, people and their physicians often blame spiders as the cause of skin lesions with no proof of spider

involvement when there are many similar-appearing, non-spider malady; therefore, care must be exerted in the diagnostic process.

Sometimes a person may not be aware of having been bitten until pain and other symptoms begin to develop. Other species of arthropods whose bites or stings may be mistaken for that of a spider include ticks, fleas, bees, wasps, bedbugs, mosquitoes, the conenose (kissing) bug (*Triatoma protracta*), deer flies, horse flies, and water bugs (*Lethocerus* spp.).

For first aid treatment of a spider bite, wash the bite, and use ice, ice water or cold compresses to reduce swelling

and discomfort. Bites or stings from a variety of arthropods can result in an itching wound. Rather than scratching, if necessary try to relieve the itch with medication. Scratching can break the skin and introduce bacterial infection, which you or even a physician may mistake for an arachnid bite. If you receive a bite that causes an unusual or severe reaction, contact a physician. If you catch the critter in the act, save it for identification, preserve it (or whatever parts of it remain), and take it to your county UC Cooperative Extension office. If no one there can identify it, ask that it be forwarded to a qualified arachnologist.



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WARNING ON THE USE OF PESTICIDES

Pesticides are poisonous. Some pesticides are more toxic than others and present higher risks to people, nontarget organisms, and the environment. A pesticide is any material (natural, organic, or synthetic) used to control, prevent, kill, suppress, or repel pests. "Pesticide" is a broad term that includes insecticides, herbicides (weed or plant killers), fungicides, rodenticides, miticides (mite control), molluscicides (for snails and slugs), and other materials like growth regulators or antimicrobial products such as bleach and sanitary wipes that kill bacteria.

Always read and carefully follow all precautions and directions provided on the container label. The label is the law and failure to follow label instructions is an illegal use of the pesticide. Store all chemicals in the original labeled containers in a locked cabinet or shed, away from food or feeds, and out of the reach of children, unauthorized persons, and animals. Never place pesticides in food or drink containers. Consult the pesticide label to determine active ingredients, correct locations for use, signal words, and personal protective equipment you should wear to protect yourself from exposure when applying the material.

Pesticides applied in your garden and landscape can move through water or with soil away from where they were applied, resulting in contamination of creeks, lakes, rivers, and the ocean. Confine pesticides to the property being treated and never allow them to get into drains or creeks. Avoid getting pesticide onto neighboring properties (called drift), especially onto gardens containing fruits or vegetables ready to be picked.

Do not place containers with pesticide in the trash or pour pesticides down the sink, toilet, or outside drains. Either use all the pesticide according to the label until the container is empty or take unwanted pesticides to your local Household Hazardous Waste Collection site. Contact your county agricultural commissioner for additional information on safe container disposal and for the location of the Hazardous Waste Collection site nearest you. Follow label directions for disposal of empty containers. Never reuse or burn the containers or dispose of them in such a manner that they may contaminate water supplies or natural waterways.

Produced by the **Statewide Integrated Pest Management Program**, University of California, 2801 Second Street, Davis, CA 95618-7774.

Technical Editor: K Windbiel-Rojas

ANR Associate Editor: AM Sutherland

Editor and Designer: B Messenger-Sikes

ILLUSTRATIONS: Figures 1-4, and 6: RS Vetter; Figure 5: adapted from Hedges, SA, Lacey MS, and Kaston BJ; Table 1: RS Vetter, Jack Kelly Clark.

This and other Pest Notes are available at ipm.ucanr.edu.

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University of California scientists and other qualified professionals have anonymously peer reviewed this publication for technical accuracy. The ANR Associate Editor for Urban Pest Management managed this process.

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This material is partially based upon work supported by the Extension Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, under special project Section 3(d), Integrated Pest Management.

Suggested citation: Vetter RS. 2020. UC IPM *Pest Notes: Spiders*. UC ANR Publication 7442. Oakland, CA.

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