

Spiders in Maryland

There are many families of spiders, all of which are predators. Spiders are not insects but belong to a closely related group called arachnids. Some make webs; others such as wolf spiders actively pursue their prey. Spiders are common in trees, shrubs, herbaceous plants, and on the ground in landscapes. Most spiders are generalized predators, feeding on a wide range of prey (insects, other spiders, etc.).

Most spiders are shy and harmless to humans. Normally, they will not attempt to bite unless accidentally trapped or held. They are beneficial by feeding on harmful insects. Spiders are important in reducing the numbers of many pest insects in gardens and landscape vegetation. Killing of spiders should be avoided, if possible.

Spiders enter homes through screens, around windows, doors and cracks. Maintaining tight fitting screens, weather stripping and sealing cracks can help prevent spider entry into the home. To discourage spider breeding near the home, remove trash, piles of old lumber and bricks, weeds, leaves, flower pots and any other objects piled or stacked next to the house that provide areas where spiders can live undisturbed.

Cobweb Spiders

Cobweb spiders are common household spiders that enter homes when they are small. They build irregular webs in areas where insects fly or rest, usually in corners of rooms or windows. When they are active in the web, the web remains relatively inconspicuous, but when these spiders leave a web or die, the web becomes covered with dust and is easily seen. Cleaning or dusting in areas frequented by these spiders is sufficient for control.

Yellow House Spider

Yellow house spiders are small, about ¼ inch long, and move rapidly. They may be found in all rooms of a house. The



spiders enter homes in early fall and are active for several months weaving small white webs in confined spaces where they spend the winter. In the spring, they usually emerge from their white web cells and find their way outside.

These spiders can bite humans and cause a small irritating spot which may not heal for 8 to 10 days.

Wolf Spiders

Wolf spiders are active hunters and do not construct webs. Some can be fairly large and have a frightening appearance. They do not attack humans even if they run across one's hand or foot, but if handled or confined, they can give a sharp bite. The bite is not dangerous.



Wolf spiders come indoors most frequently in the fall and are usually found in basements. Exclusion is the best way to keep them outdoors.

Jumping Spiders

Jumping spiders move in jumps or short, rapid runs. They are frequently found around windows in search of prey such as flies. They are often black, quite hairy, and as large as 1/3 inch long. They may be marked with red or white dots. Jumping spiders generally do not appear in large numbers and can be removed individually.



Crab Spider

Crab spiders are bright white, yellow or reddish with their legs projecting from their sides giving them the appearance of a crab. They enter the home on cut flowers and cannot survive indoors.

Black Widow Spider



The black widow is common in Maryland, but is not often found indoors. These spiders are most often found in basement window wells, beneath lawn benches or porches, and in garages, tool sheds, old lumber piles, rock piles, trash piles, and water meters. Probably they are most often brought inside in objects such as boxes, flowerpots and baskets where they have established their irregular webs.

The black widow female becomes mature in late summer and fall. She is confined to her web and is very clumsy when walking on a flat surface. Her appearance is as follows: body about ½ inch long, jet black with a bright red hour glass shape on the belly. This red mark is easily seen because she hangs upside down in the web. Sometimes there may be small dull red marks on the top of the abdomen and at the tip. No other spider in Maryland looks like the black widow, nor is any as poisonous. It is more dangerous to children than adults.

The black widow is not aggressive. It will, however, bite instinctively when touched or pressed, and for this reason one should be very careful when working around areas where black widows may be established. Take proper precautions: wear gloves and pay attention to where you are working.

Black widow bites are sharp and painful. The victim should go to the doctor immediately for treatment. It is important to recognize this spider and describe the symptoms accurately

and fully so the physician can diagnose the trouble correctly. To control the black widow, carefully remove all materials where it might hide. This spider can be cleaned out of an area simply by knocking the webs, spiders, and round, tan egg sacs down with a stick and crushing them under foot. Household insect sprays will kill the spiders when hit directly.

Brown Recluse Spiders

The appearance of the brown recluse spider is unique. Its body is about ¼ inch long, the legs covering the area of a coin the size of a quarter. The front half of the spider is marked with a violin shaped design and the rear half of the abdomen is unmarked and tan or brown. All other brown colored spiders this size have either no design at all or have stripes or spot on the front half – never a violin shaped design. Abdomens of other spiders are rarely unmarked but generally exhibit spots, triangles or bands.



The brown recluse makes no conspicuous web, but moves about rapidly. Bites are always contracted when the spider is inadvertently pressed or touched.

This spider is not found in Maryland. It is a poisonous spider principally found in the Midwest and Southwestern United States. The bite of a brown recluse spider causes a wound, which takes 6 weeks or more to heal. In rare instances, it has caused death to sensitive individuals. This spider, where it is common, is very shy and reclusive. It is not active in rooms, which are commonly used, but stays in storage areas, closets and infrequently used clothes and beds.

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