



HOME & GARDEN

Spiders in the Home

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Quick Facts...

Most spiders found in Colorado are beneficial and should not be destroyed.

The black widow and brown recluse are the only dangerous spiders in Colorado.

Neither spider is aggressive. Bites from them are rare.

A bite can cause painful illness but is seldom fatal.

A bite from a poisonous spider should be treated by a physician.

Spider populations can be controlled by a combination of sanitation and insecticides.

Most spiders are regarded as beneficial and should not be destroyed. Many people fear spiders because of stories or myths about them. Others object to spiders because of their habit of building webs in and around the home. Spiders are most visible and cause the most concern in the fall when they often move into homes.

Spiders differ from insects in that they have eight legs rather than six and only two body regions instead of three. Some spiders spin a web, others do not.

Indoors, many spiders may be found in basements, crawl spaces and other areas where it is somewhat damp. Other spiders, however, prefer a drier situation and can be found in the upper corners of rooms, in attics or in floor vents.

Life Cycle

After mating, female spiders lay eggs in clusters called egg sacs. A few species lay their eggs in dark hiding areas and not in a silken sac.

Some female spiders guard their egg sacs; others carry the sacs with them. A female may produce several egg sacs in her life. Eggs usually hatch into small spiders within three weeks. Mating and egg laying can occur at any time of the year, depending upon species.

Potentially Dangerous Spiders

Most spiders are not considered dangerous. However, two spiders found in Colorado — the black widow and the brown recluse — have poisonous bites. These two spiders are not aggressive and bites are uncommon. Their bites are rarely fatal but can cause serious illness.

Black Widow Spider

The black widow spider, *Latrodectus hesperus*, is common throughout Colorado. This spider can be found in undergrowth, under stones, in the openings to rodent burrows, in hollow trees or in any other kind of protected area. Around the home it may be found in garages, window wells, crawl spaces and occasionally in basements. It likes undisturbed areas in and behind objects. Homes in new developments will be bothered for some time from natural populations in the area.

The female black widow is poisonous, while the male is not. The female is about 1 1/2 inches long. The body, excluding the legs, is about 1/2 inch, jet black or dark brown, and usually has red markings that can take the shape of an hourglass on the underside of the abdomen (Figure 1). The male is smaller with brown markings. The two sexes may be easily distinguished by their sizes and by the pattern of the red marks on the abdomen.



Figure 1: Female black widow spider showing hourglass marking on abdomen.



Figure 2: Brown recluse spider.



Figure 3: Wolf spider.

Brown Recluse Spider

The brown recluse spider, *Loxosceles reclusa*, is rare in Colorado. There are a number of other possible causes for symptoms similar to a bite from a brown recluse spider. In Colorado, these should be considered more likely than a brown recluse bite, given its rarity in our state. Specimens have been found and positively identified in the southeastern portion of the state. Brown recluse spiders occasionally have been brought into other parts of Colorado with household effects being moved in from other states where this spider is common. The brown recluse can live both indoors and outdoors, but in cooler climates it prefers to live in houses. It usually is found in bathrooms, bedrooms, closets, garages, basements and cellars.

The brown recluse spider is about 1/2 inch long, usually tan or buckskin, with long, dark brown legs and a violin-shaped dark mark immediately behind the eyes. The base of the violin mark is on the head with the violin neck pointing toward the abdomen (Figure 2). The brown recluse spider is the only spider with three pairs of eyes; all others have four pairs. It produces little webbing since it hunts its food.

Spider Bites

Most spiders are not aggressive and will bite only when injured or trapped. If a bite is suspected or is known to have occurred, follow these first aid steps recommended by the American Red Cross:

1. Treat the site of the bite with an antiseptic to prevent infection;
2. Apply ice or an ice pack to the site of the bite to reduce pain and swelling; and
3. If a black widow or brown recluse spider is suspected, or if serious symptoms develop such as increasing pain or swelling, take the patient to a physician.

If at all possible, bring the spider to the physician. Effective antivenins are available for black widows but can be used only if the spider that inflicted the bite can be positively identified.

Other Common Spiders

Wolf Spider

Wolf spiders (Figure 3) are abundant in Colorado and often noticed because of their large size and rapid movement. There are many kinds of wolf spiders. They range from about 1/2 inch to 2 inches long and are brown with various markings. They do not spin a web but roam at night to hunt for food. Wolf spiders are often confused with the brown recluse, but they lack the unmistakable violin-shaped marking behind the head.

The wolf spider is shy and seeks to run away when disturbed. It is not considered poisonous to people.

Tarantula

Tarantulas occur in southeast Colorado and occasionally appear in large numbers. They are not harmful to humans and should not be a cause for alarm.

Solpugid or Sun Spider

The solpugid is not a true spider. However, it often is confused with dangerous spiders. The solpugid varies in size from 1 to 2 inches long. It is tan with reddish brown markings. It has a pointed beak, a rather hairy body and two heavy feelers on the front which resemble an extra pair of legs (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Solpugid or sun spider.



Figure 5: Aranaeus spider.

The solpugid runs about on the ground to capture its prey. It is common in Colorado and occasionally found indoors, often in bathrooms. Sun spiders will bite people if handled, but their bite is not considered poisonous.

Araneus Spiders

These spiders, also known as cat-faced spiders, monkey-faced spiders, humpbacked-spiders or orb weavers, are found throughout Colorado. They are medium in size, 1/2 to 3/4 inch long, usually brownish with a large and predominant abdomen. The back of the abdomen is often wrinkled into the form of a cat or monkey face (Figure 5).

The spider spins an orb-shaped web in undisturbed areas. It can be found in garages, basements and similar areas.

The araneus spider is not poisonous. It is considered one of the most beneficial spiders. A close relative of araneus is the garden spider, which is large and black with yellow markings. They often alarm people because of their size, but they are harmless to humans and beneficial in the garden because of the insects they eat.

Controlling Spiders Around the Home

It usually is unnecessary to control spiders. If for some reason it is desirable to get rid of spiders in a home, a combination of sanitation and pesticides should, with some difficulty, be effective. Pesticides alone, without some effort to remove or modify favorable spider habitats, will not be effective.

Remove rocks, wood piles, compost piles, old boards and other possible hiding places in the yard, especially near the house. To eliminate many spider entrances, caulk cracks and crevices in the foundation and make sure that all screens and doors are tight. Keep crawl spaces free of debris. Remove old clothes, papers, boxes and other potential hiding places from basements or other dark storage areas. Periodically vacuum spider webs.

The occasional spider can be removed by hand (wear gloves or grasp the spider with a tissue) or vacuum, or controlled with a household insecticide aerosol. If large numbers of spiders are migrating into the home or it seems that the spiders are breeding within the home, then a residual pesticide labeled for control of spiders around the home may be used. Spray the pesticide around the foundation outside the home. Also, spray or paint the pesticide in the corners and along the baseboards of spider-infested areas.

Be sure to read and follow all instructions on the label.