

Spiders

Most buildings have a resident spider population feeding on household insects, stray flies, and each other. They live in neglected areas such as attics, basements, or crawl spaces; behind and under furniture, bookcases or appliances; and in cracks between boards. Corners and baseboards are favorite locations.

House spiders are seldom or never seen except during housecleaning, but some of the larger species mature and become more active from late August to early October. At that time, the house may appear to have been invaded. Outdoor spiders do sometimes blow or crawl in through an open window, but most either die of thirst in the house or fall prey to resident species.

Depending on your outlook, spiders in the house can be an advantage or disadvantage. A few spiders are rarely noticeable and help control other insects that find their way into the home. Spiders do, however, produce sheets or strands (cobwebs) of silk webbing and small white specks of excrement that may drop on underlying items. People with allergies to spider venom, a fear of insects, or severe health problems should minimize the chance of any encounter with spiders.

Fear of Spiders

It is surprising how many people have a fear of spiders. Even people who aren't really afraid may automatically behave as if they are. Horror movies, other people, and just plain misinformation about spiders are often causes for this fear. Teasing by parents or children creates false impressions and fear.

Another factor contributing to the fear is that spiders move quickly, giving the impression that they are "after us." Some spiders hang around at eye level, where we blunder into their webs. Most people consider spiders to be ugly and frightening. In truth, many are quite handsome and graceful, and all of them are fascinating.

Whatever the cause for fear of spiders, the fear is real. With some thought, effort, and accurate knowledge about spiders, it is possible to reduce that fear.

Basics of Spiders

Spiders are predators of insects and other creatures. Usually they capture prey smaller than or equal to their own size. Humans are

far too big, even for the most ambitious spider. Many spiders are small and have small mouth parts. These spiders are not capable of biting through human skin, even if they were to try.

Those spiders that can bite through human skin do so only when provoked. Often bites occur when the spider is pinched or trapped in clothing. Their bite is a defensive reaction. For example, when you are cleaning the garage, you may stick your fingers in the spider's area, or trap it. Wearing gloves will prevent bites.

Spiders can be ignored if their numbers are small and they stay in out-of-the-way places. They primarily eat insects already present in homes, such as cupboard pests, silverfish, sowbugs, and clothes moths. Sometimes they eat each other or capture stray insect invaders, such as root weevils and blowflies. Spiders that are more visible, the ones that get trapped in the tub or run up a wall, can be captured and released outside, vacuumed up, swatted, or sprayed with an insecticide.

Don't overspray, use just the small amount needed to get the job done.

Spider activity declines by mid-October. Unless you are continually introducing new spiders on firewood, your household spiders will retire into obscurity for another year, but they will continue killing several times their weight in household insect pests.

“Poisonous” Spiders

Because spiders inject a small amount of venom into their prey, they are all poisonous. Only a few spiders, however, are known to be dangerously venomous to humans, and their poison has a severe effect on most people. Other spiders, if they are able to penetrate the skin, produce only a mild reaction, comparable to that from a mosquito bite, or no reaction at all, unless the bitten individual has an allergy to that particular venom.

One dangerously venomous spider known to occur in Washington is the black widow. It is not native to the Puget Sound region; it is common in Eastern Washington. Specimens are sometimes introduced here, but apparently the species cannot establish a permanent population in our climate.

The aggressive house, or hobo, spider is frequently found in crawl spaces, basements, and garages in Western Washington. This is a fairly large funnel weaver species that spends most of its time hanging around dark corners or running rapidly along floors and walls. Bites from this spider can cause severe reactions in humans that may last for several months. However, no deaths are known to have occurred as a result of a bite from this spider.

The much-feared brown recluse spider is not known to be established anywhere west of the Rocky Mountains. The chance that you will run across one is extremely small. Occasional reports of brown recluse spider

bites are almost always the result of an encounter with the aggressive house spider.

Spider Management

Only you can select the methods that will solve your spider problem. There will always be spiders, and the best solution is to manipulate the environment so that they don't live where you do. It is unrealistic to expect that spiders can be totally eliminated, which is a good thing. On the other hand, one need not live with an abundance of spiders. If you feel the need to do something about household spiders, the following approaches will reduce their numbers.

Habitat Modification Those spiders that are capable of moving indoors from the outdoors are the ones that establish their webs in wood piles, junk piles, disused yard furniture, tarps, porch superstructures, ventilation structures, brick piles, etc. Eliminating or keeping these sites relatively clean will help reduce the spider population.

Structural Modification Prevent spider entry by keeping doors and windows screened, and by weatherstripping doors so there are no openings between the bottom of the door and the door sill. Close gaps around water pipes under sinks and seal cracks and openings in the house.

Inside Sanitation Stored boxes, magazine piles, and other items in basements and attics create ideal hiding spaces for spiders. Many live out their entire lives there without ever being noticed. The old practice of spring and fall cleaning is an excellent control measure. Vacuum behind and under furniture and bookcases, along baseboards and corners, and in storage areas.

Pesticides Indoors An aerosol bomb or fogger will reduce spiders, as well as fleas and other insects that are present. It will not provide residual control for insects coming in later. The pesticide might not penetrate

inaccessible areas. **Be sure to follow label directions.**

Pesticides Outdoors Products can be applied around the outside of doors, windows, vents, outdoor stairwells, window wells, foundations, and cracks and openings. Be certain the application site (indoors or outdoors) is listed on the label. The product should be labeled for use on spiders or nuisance pests. **Be sure to follow label directions.**

Firewood deserves a special mention. Spiders seek warmth and shelter in protected spaces such as logs, under piles of rocks, bark and other debris. The wood pile is a choice winter residence. Protect outside wood piles with a covering. The more debris that falls on the wood, the more attractive spiders will find it. It is not advisable to spray the wood pile. Pesticides with enough residual effect to keep spiders out can be toxic to handle, and burning wood treated with pesticides is probably not good for your health.

New Construction If you are adding a room, building a house, or remodeling, consider treating the wall voids with relatively non-toxic (to humans) boric acid or silica aerogel. These *are* toxic to insects.

Exterminators Professional pest control operators will do the job for you. Most rely solely on pesticides, and it's wise to find out exactly what they use and then do some research on the product, primarily its active ingredient.

Use Integrated Pest Management

Successful pest management requires a combination of methods. and each situation calls for a different strategy. Pesticides are not always necessary. Do your homework before choosing one.

Read the label!

For answers to questions about the use and toxicity of specific pesticides, call the National Pesticide Information Center – 1-800-858-7378.

07/11