

Educating People To Help Themselves

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Controlling Spiders in Maryland

Extension Bulletin 29



Controlling Spiders

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Summary of Control Recommendations

Outside Areas

- Caulk and weather-strip all cracks, openings, windows, and doors.
- Create an 18-inch clutter-free buffer zone around the foundation free of plants and debris.

Remove conditions that encourage spider breeding in areas immediately surrounding the home to greatly reduce the number of nuisance spiders (and other pests) that move inside. Eliminate trash, piles of old lumber and bricks, weeds, leaves, flowerpots, and any other objects piled or stacked next to the house that furnish areas where spiders and their prey can live undisturbed and reproduce in great numbers. This includes pruning foliage so that no plant material touches the home.

Indoor Areas

- Vacuum frequently and remove clutter to eliminate spider food and shelter.
- Capture, vacuum, or crush free-running spiders.
- Vacuum cobweb spiders, their webs, and the pea-sized silk sacs that contain their eggs.
- Aerosols containing pyrethrin or synthetic pyrethroids and labeled for indoor use will kill spiders if sprayed directly on them.

Aerosol insecticide sprays are not generally recommended for indoor use because frequent, excessive, and/or improper use can stain surfaces and can pose a health risk. Spiders are not very susceptible to pesticides applied to surfaces so they usually must be sprayed directly to be killed. If you can see the spider to spray it you can probably vacuum it or crush it with less potential damage to the home. Regular cleaning or dusting in the areas frequented by spiders is preferred and generally sufficient for their control and the control of the pests they eat.

- Hire professional help to control brown recluse infestations.

DO NOT ALLOW CHILDREN OR PETS ON SURFACES TREATED WITH INSECTICIDES

Controlling Spiders

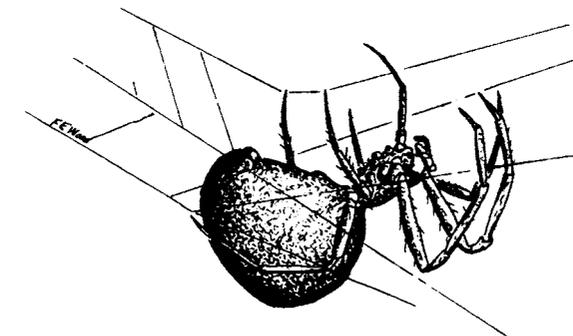
All spiders are predators, feeding on living insects and related creatures. Most do not come into homes, and, if they wander in they will not survive indoors. Those few species that do thrive inside homes feed primarily on other spiders and small insects or other arthropod invaders like sowbugs and millipedes. This bulletin describes the seven types of spiders most frequently encountered indoors in Maryland, including three that you should remove or destroy because of the threat of bites.

Spiders enter houses through loose screens or improperly sealed windows and doors. Cracks or holes provide easy access for very small newly hatched spiders. Larger spiders can also enter through surprisingly small openings and cracks, so the first and most important method of control is to caulk up cracks and replace or repair all weather seals around doors and windows. Both spiders and their prey will be limited by this simple but very important routine maintenance because spiders are difficult to control with insecticides.

Cobweb Spiders

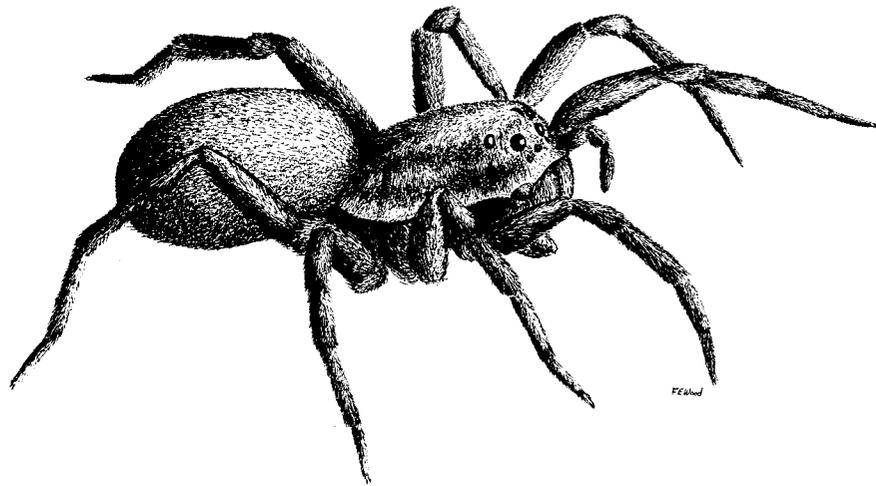
The first evidence of cobweb spiders in your home may be the appearance of gray dust-covered webs in the corners of a ceiling.

These common spiders can initially enter houses when they are newly hatched. Once established, cobweb spiders can reproduce and maintain permanent populations in a home feeding on small insects and other arthropods. Young spiders build irregular webs in areas where insects might fly or alight, usually in corners of rooms or windows. If the location is unsuccessful and the spider moves to a better hunting area or dies, the web quickly becomes covered with dust and is easily seen. Abandoned, dust-covered webs are the cobwebs that dismay housekeepers by dangling from the ceiling.



Wolf Spiders

Wolf spiders and other smaller hunting spiders come inside, on or below ground level, where they are found running on the floor. These spiders do not wait in webs but actively chase their prey. Some of them are quite large and have a frightening appearance. Wolf spiders do not attack humans even if they run across your bare hand or foot, but if handled or confined, they can give a sharp, but not dangerous, bite. They are most frequently seen indoors in the early fall and are best controlled by exclusion with well-maintained weather seals around doors and windows.



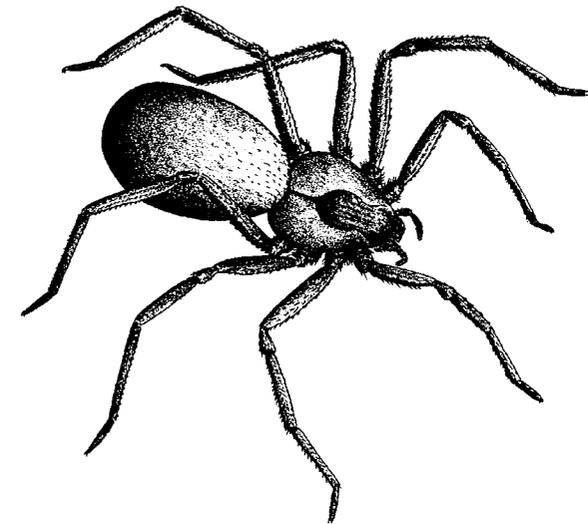
Brown Recluse Spider

This spider is not frequently encountered in Maryland, but may infest buildings after the introduction of household goods from the Midwest and Southwest, where it is common. The bite of the brown recluse causes a wound that can take six weeks or more to heal. In rare instances, it has caused death to sensitive individuals. This shy, reclusive spider is not active in rooms that are used often, but stays in storage areas, closets, and infrequently used clothes and beds during the day, hunting by night.

The appearance of the brown recluse spider is unique. Its body is about 1/4 inch in length with long, shiny, smooth legs covering the area of a coin at least the size of a quarter. The top front half of the spider is marked with a violin-shaped design and the rear half or abdomen is unmarked and tan or brown. All other brown-colored spiders this size have either no design at all or have stripes or spots on the front half—never a violin-shaped design. Abdomens of other spiders are rarely unmarked, but generally exhibit spots, triangles, or bands. Under magnification the body coloring plus the characteristic arrangement of six eyes in three groups of two each is diagnostic.

The brown recluse spider makes no conspicuous web and moves about rapidly. Bites are the result of the spider being inadvertently pressed or touched. The initial bite is painless or exhibits a slight stinging sensation. A localized burning sensation lasts up to an hour followed by the formation of a pus-filled blister several hours later. Fever, malaise, cramps, nausea, and vomiting may occur within the first 24 hours. The potentially large, deep wound should receive medical attention. Uncomplicated bites normally heal within two months.

This spider does not survive winters in unheated structures in Maryland. If you suspect a brown recluse infestation, use sticky traps like those sold for cockroaches to catch spiders for identification by an expert. Infestations of brown recluse spiders should be managed by experienced professionals. A different species of recluse spider occasionally occurs in cockroach-infested basements and underground utility areas of large urban buildings in the mid-Atlantic region.



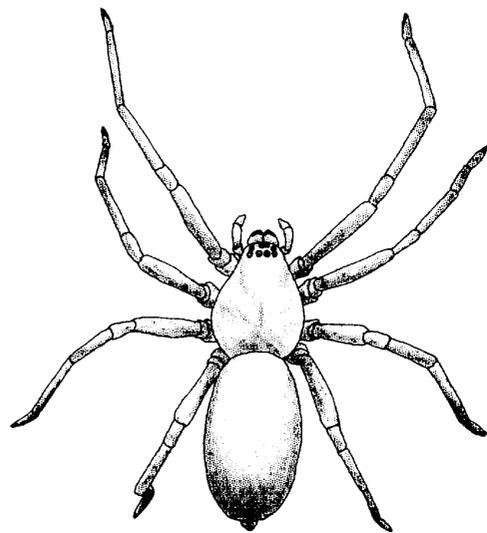
Yellow House Spider

The majority of indoor spider bites in Maryland are probably caused by the yellow house spider, a member of the sac spider family.

These small (almost 1/2 inch long), rapidly moving, pale yellowish spiders can be found in all rooms of the house. They enter homes in greater numbers in the early fall and may be active for several months. Small white silk sacs in confined spaces serve as their retreat during the day. Active hunting occurs at night. The tendency to build their resting sacs in undisturbed areas make their bites a phenomenon of stored or infrequently used clothing and guest bedrooms where the victim rolls onto or pinches the spider. In most instances the resulting bite is initially unnoticed, but a small necrotic lesion appears and can take two weeks to heal completely.

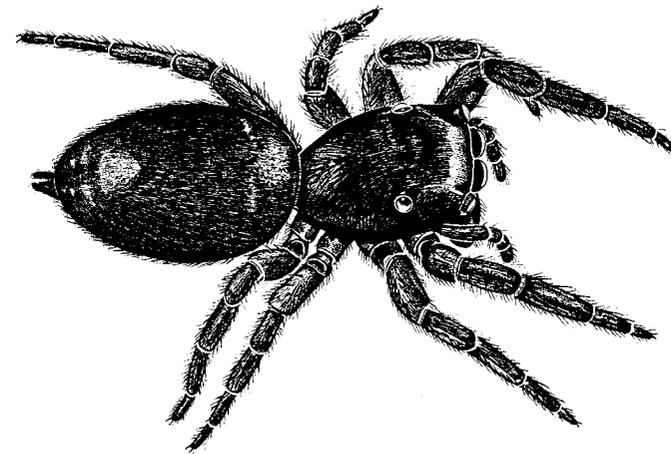
The sacs have been implicated in equipment malfunction when built in sensitive places like smoke detectors or gas jets.

Consider destroying or removing yellow house spiders when they are found inside.



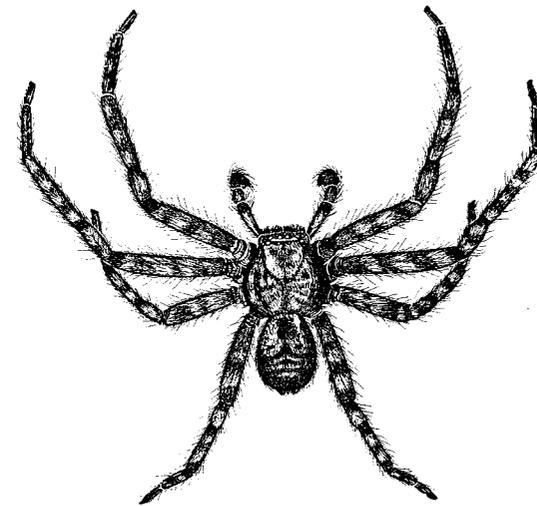
Jumping Spiders

The sun-loving jumping spiders move in jumps or short, rapid runs. They do not build an extensive web and are frequently found around windows where they stalk and pounce on insects. Many have bright markings and are extremely hairy. The male of one of our common species is more than 1/2 inch long, covered in black hair with white and brilliant turquoise markings. Generally, they do not invade in large numbers and can be crushed or removed individually. (Invert drinking glass over spider-slide index card under glass and carry outside for release.)



Crab Spiders

Crab spiders look like tiny crabs in movement as well as appearance. They can be bright white, yellow, or reddish in color with their legs projecting from their sides. If they wander in under a door or are brought in on cut flowers they will not survive indoors. Outdoors, they frequently rest unnoticed on flowers to ambush insects. If catch and release is beyond your tolerance, crushing them or vacuuming them up is all the attention necessary for their control.



Black Widow Spider

The black widow spider is common in Maryland, but is not often found indoors. They usually live in undisturbed outdoor areas like basement window wells, beneath lawn benches or porches, and in garages, tool sheds, old lumber piles, rock piles, trash piles, and water meters. When they are found indoors they have probably hitchhiked inside in objects such as boxes, flowerpots, and baskets where they established their irregular cobwebs.

The black widow female becomes mature in late summer and fall. She stays confined to her web and is very clumsy when walking on a flat surface. Her appearance is as follows: body about 1/2 inch long, jet black with a large, round, shiny abdomen marked with a bright red hourglass 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 venomous.

The black widow is not aggressive but might be more likely to bite just after laying eggs. These spiders will, however, bite instinctively when touched or pressed, and for this reason you should be very careful when working around areas where black widows might be established. Take proper precautions—wear gloves and pay attention when working in dark, sheltered areas.

Black widow bites may initially go unnoticed or feel like a pinprick. While dull pain begins in the affected limb, pain and cramps in large muscles are common as well as sweating, weakness, nausea, and vomiting. Death is rare, but severe reactions can cause heart irregularities and difficulty breathing. Black widow bites are most dangerous to children, the elderly, and those with serious health problems. It is important to recognize this spider and describe the symptoms completely so the physician can make an accurate diagnosis.

To control the black widow, carefully remove all materials where they might hide. They 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 underfoot. Household aerosol sprays with pyrethrin or synthetic pyrethroids will kill the spiders when they are hit directly.

