

Colorado Arthropod of Interest

American House Spider

Scientific Name: *Parasteatoda tepidariorum*

Order: Araneae (Spiders)

Family: Theridiidae (Combfooted or Cobweb Spiders)

Identification and Descriptive Features:

The abdomen is generally round, somewhat higher than long with a light spot at the tip. Overall color is gray or light brown with black and white markings. The cephalothorax is yellow to brown and the legs are yellow to brown with darker rings. Males (ca 4mm body length) are smaller and darker than the females (5-8mm body length).

Occurrence in and around Homes: This spider may be found potentially throughout the state as it is commonly transported by humans. Around homes the American house spider is typically found in sites of relatively high humidity, such as basements, greenhouses and crawl spaces. In some areas of the US it is the most common producer of cobwebs in homes and a common spider often found on the sides of buildings. In Colorado it is relatively infrequently found and other cobweb spiders are more common within homes.

Life History and Habits: Webs are produced under overhangs and when constructed within buildings are often located at corners where two surfaces come together. Webs are in the form of loose, tangled sticky silken threads. Favorable sites where food is plentiful may support several spiders and result in extensive webbing, but poor sites are abandoned. Flying insects are the most common prey and they are capable of subduing fairly large insects (e.g., blow flies).

Adults can be found in all seasons but are most common in late summer. Eggs are produced from late spring through late summer, in light brown, pear-shaped sacs covered with loose silk that hang in the web. Several egg sacs may be produced by a single female during one season.



Figures 1, 2. Two views of an adult female American house spider. In the top photo the spider is next to its egg sac. The top photograph is courtesy of David Shetlar, The Ohio State University.



Figure 3. Female (left) and adult male (right) American house spider.

common than in Colorado and there are a few credible reports where they have bitten humans. The bites normally do not produce any noticeable symptoms although there is one apparent case from Florida of a serious allergic reaction to the bite of *P. tepidariorum*.

Upon hatch the spiderlings remain in the web until after they have molted to the second instar. A few days after this they disperse, usually by ballooning on air currents.

Medical Importance: These are non-aggressive spiders that very rarely leave webs and will readily retreat into a protected corner of the web if disturbed. In many parts of the country this is much more



Figure 4. Most of the time the American house spider spends in a protected area at the corner of the web, hidden and with the legs pulled in.