

Spooky Spiders

Spiders are arachnids, closely related to other 8-legged critters like ticks, mites, harvestmen, and scorpions. Spiders help to kill other pests both in, and out of buildings, and are beneficial. There are only a few spiders whose bite requires medical attention, such as the western or black widow spider, in Colorado.



Common Colorado spiders:

Widow spiders, particularly the western widow (*Latrodectus hesperus*) are common in Colorado. Bites from the widow spider are painful, generally not fatal, but dangerous because they contain a nerve toxin. The adult female is a solid black spider with a bulbous abdomen (hind section) and a red hourglass on its underside (not on top). This spider is clumsy out of its web and bites usually only occur if a hand is stuck in the web, or if a spider is inadvertently grabbed while cleaning areas like a garage or shed.

Black widows come out at night and hunt in their cobweb-like webs. Search for widows at night with a flashlight and carefully crush spiders, or treat the spider directly with an aerosol insecticide.

Since black widows don't move easily, they wait for prey to come to them. Often, exterior lighting will attract many insects that they catch in their webs and eat. Changing the exterior lighting to sulfur vapor bulbs reduces attraction of prey insects and will help keep widows away from the grounds.

Funnel weaver spiders, or grass spiders, enter buildings during late summer and early fall. They produce dense mats of silk in areas such as shrubs, thick grass, or corners of buildings. Funnel weaver spiders are sometimes mistaken for the brown recluse, a potentially poisonous species that does not naturally occur in Colorado.

Cobweb spiders/House spiders are common inhabitants of dark corners around the home. They have a generally bulbous body and create messy webs with sticky threads. The majority of these spiders are harmless.

Did You Know?

- Spiders have 8 legs, 2 body segments, and 2 palps instead of antennae.
- Black widow spiders are the major spider of medical concern in Colorado.
- Brown recluse spiders are NOT found in Colorado.
- Spiders are beneficial organisms because they prey upon many other pest insects.
- The best control methods for spiders include exclusion, cleaning, reducing clutter, and tolerance.



Above:
Western black widow,
Whitney Cranshaw, Bugwood



Above:
Funnel web spider,
Whitney Cranshaw, Bugwood



Above:
Cobweb spider R. Davis,
Utah State University

Thanks to Ryan S. Davis for providing information for this publication.

Common Colorado spiders:

Cellar spiders live in dark corners of cellars, crawl spaces, and garages. Spiders in this family have long and skinny legs with small bodies. They are true spiders that spin untidy webs which are often quite extensive. Cellar spiders typically stay in one place, don't bother people, and are not known to bite.

Sac spiders get their name because they spend daylight hours in a flattened silken sac, often in the upper corners of rooms or in wall cracks. Most sac spiders are pale colored. Sac spiders are suspected as being the most common source of spider bites in homes. They are active hunters, frequently found wandering in homes during fall, particularly at night. Their venom is cytotoxic, causing tissues at the bite site to die (necrosis).

Wolf spiders are active hunters that do not produce a snaring web. Most are grey or brown and some are quite large. Wolf spiders occasionally enter buildings, particularly in areas of new development where their habitat was disturbed. They are normally shy and not dangerous to humans, although large species can bite.



Left:
Wolf spider
Whitney Cranshaw, Bugwood



Above:
Cellar spider,
Joseph Berger,
Bugwood



For more info, check out:

Spiders in the Home, F. B. Peairs, W. S. Cranshaw and P. E. Cushing <http://www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs/insect/05512.html>

Top 20 Arachnids, Utah State University Cooperative Extension <https://utahpests.usu.edu/upddl/hdm/top-20-arachnids#Agelenidae>



Above:
Yellow sac spider
Gary Alpert, Bugwood



Managing Spiders with Integrated Pest Management

- Caulk, seal and screen all entry points into the building to exclude spiders.
- Change exterior lighting from the standard lights to sodium vapor bulbs to limit prey insects coming to the building.
- Vacuum regularly to suck up spiders, webbing, and other insects that can serve as food for spiders.
- Minimize clutter in classrooms to reduce areas suitable for spiders to hide, reproduce, and lay eggs.
- Use sticky traps along baseboards to monitor and help control ground dwelling spiders.
- Interior or exterior insecticidal sprays are generally ineffective at reducing spider populations, but may provide some repellency.
- Insecticidal dusts can be used in low traffic areas such as boiler rooms, crawl spaces, and voids for long residual control of spiders.



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