

MESSENGER-INQUIRER



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Kentucky Spiders

While taking advantage of warm fall days to work in the landscape and clean around the home, garage, and outbuildings, you may see spiders. University of Kentucky Extension Entomologists describe several common spiders found in Kentucky.

Spiders feed mostly on small insects and other arthropods. Some trap their prey in webs or snares. Others are active hunters and use excellent vision to ambush their food.

Virtually all spiders have poison glands that connect with their fangs. Venom produced by the glands is used in defense and to kill or paralyze prey. Only a few species have venom that is toxic to humans. Most species do not attempt to bite. Many have fangs that are not capable of piercing the skin. Some bites will result in a reaction like a wasp or bee sting, but could cause an allergic reaction.

Most spiders found in homes and buildings are accidental invaders. They have entered around doors, windows, or other openings.

Wolf spiders look fierce, and their rapid movements make them seem aggressive. Most are dark brown. Wolf spiders actively hunt prey and do not use snares or webs. They have strong fangs and could bite if disturbed or pinched. They inhabit grassy or leaf-covered areas

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and may be active during the day or night. The female carries an egg sac on her rear-end. Wolf spiders do not persist indoors but are common accidental invaders.

Funnel web spiders (Agelenidae family) or grass spiders resemble wolf spiders but have a pair of long, distinctive silk spinning tubes at the rear of the abdomen. The spiders live in shrubbery, grass, under rocks, or in debris and seldom come indoors. They build a horizontal, sheet-like web that has a funnel-shaped retreat. Webs are most obvious when covered with morning dew.

Jumping spiders (Salticidae family) have a distinctive body shape and short, strong front legs; many are brightly colored or iridescent. Two very large eyes on the front of the head give them the best vision of all spiders. They slowly stalk their prey and make a sudden pounce from a short distance. Salticids occasionally wander indoors and may overwinter there.

Crab spiders (Thomisidae family) have two long front pairs of legs. They wait in ambush for insect prey on plants, flowers, tree trunks, or soil litter. They rarely enter buildings and do not persist indoors.

Cellar spiders (Pholcidae family) have very long, skinny legs, and a small body. They make stringy webs in shady corners of basements, pantries, closets, attics, barns, and sheds.

One of Kentucky's largest spiders is an orb weaver (Araneidae family) called the black and yellow *Argiope*, *Argiope auranti*. They are also called writing spiders because of the bold zigzag pattern built into their web. It is almost three inches long from leg tip to leg tip. *Argiope* spiders are very common in backyard gardens. Although intimidating, their bite is only dangerous to people who experience severe allergic reactions to insect and spider bites.

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Two spiders with venom medically significant in harming humans are the brown recluse and black widow. It is important to know how to identify these. The brown recluse, *Loxosceles reclusa*, is the only member of the brown spider family (Loxoscelidae) living in Kentucky.

Coloration ranges from tan to dark brown, and the abdomen and legs are uniformly colored. The legs are long, thin, and lack conspicuous spines. A distinguishing feature is the dark violin-shaped mark on its back, with the neck of the violin pointing toward the spider's rear or abdomen. This feature is consistent in adult brown recluses but sometimes less obvious in younger spiders.

Although bites are rare from the brown recluse, the venom can cause serious wounds. It is associated with tissue destruction and may require surgical treatment. Seek medical attention immediately if bitten.

The brown recluse makes a web that appears messy and dense in dark secluded areas. They tend to occur in hidden locations indoors and outdoors such as piles of cardboard or paper, stacks of cut wood, and wall-voids of buildings. They are found in protected outdoor areas as well. Brown recluses tend to hide during the day and hunt for insects at night.

Black widow spiders belong to the cobweb spider family (Theridiidae) and spin loosely organized trap webs. The female is about one-half inch long, shiny black, and usually has a red hourglass mark on the underside of the abdomen. The webs are found mostly under objects such as rocks or firewood and in dark corners of garages and outbuildings. They are not as common in homes as the brown recluse and when found, they are usually under appliances or heavy furniture.

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Black widow spiders are timid, however, and will only bite in response to being injured. Black widow venom is a nerve toxin with rapid effects. Victims should seek medical attention promptly.

More information about managing spiders is available at the University of Kentucky website <http://www.uky.edu/Ag/CritterFiles/casefile/spiders/spiderfile.htm> or through the Daviess County Extension Service Office at 270-685-8480, or Annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu.

Annette's Tip:

Avoid fertilizing trees and shrubs now because that would delay dormancy. Fertilize trees and shrubs after they are dormant, which may be after Thanksgiving. Exceptions are azaleas and rhododendrons which should be fertilized after blooming in the spring.

Owensboro Regional Farmers' Market:

The last market of the season includes guest vendors at the Holiday Market on November 2 from 8:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m. The market is located at 1205 Triplett St.

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