



Images courtesy of bugwood.org

Clockwise from top left: Medically important spiders of WA and OR: Hobo spider; black widow spider (female); yellow sac spider.

Spider Identification

Most spiders can *not* be conclusively identified by “color” or “markings” as these are highly variable, even within a single species. However, accurate ID is important if a bite is suspected. If possible, capture the spider by placing a container over it. Slide a stiff card between the surface and the spider, invert and tap firmly to knock the spider into the container, then seal with a lid. To kill the spider, place the container in the freezer overnight. You may contact your school district’s pest management professionals or your local Extension office for assistance with spider identification.

Spiders come in many shapes, colors, and sizes. While their appearance and habits vary widely, spiders have many features in common. All spiders have eight legs. Their wingless body is comprised of two parts—the head region (cephalothorax) and the abdomen—with a narrow waist between the two sections. They lack antennae, but do have structures called pedipalps at the front of the head. Most spiders are capable of spinning silk, which is produced in spinnerets found at the tip of the abdomen.

Spiders are useful predators in the garden, where they feed on pests such as mosquitoes, flies, and moths. Most spiders are relatively harmless to humans; however, they can be a nuisance indoors. Spiders typically enter buildings either by being carried in on items or through cracks and crevices. If you have insect problems, spiders are almost certain to follow. Commonly encountered spiders include cellar spiders (“daddy longlegs”), jumping spiders (active and curious hunters), and orb weavers, who like to build their webs near light sources to capture night-flying insects. Only three spider species in Washington and Oregon are considered medically important: the hobo spider (encountered throughout both states), the black widow (most common east of the Cascade Range and in southwestern Oregon), and yellow sac spiders (most commonly found east of the Cascade Range). Brown recluse spiders are not found in the Pacific Northwest.

Hobo spiders are shy and retiring. In spite of their other common name (aggressive house spider), they are not aggressive and try to escape when disturbed. Found throughout the Pacific Northwest, hobo spiders and their close relatives including the giant house spider build sheet-like webs with a funnel in the center where the spider lies in ambush for its prey. Male hobo spiders tend to wander and are often found in homes and garages in the late summer and early fall. They are poor climbers, so are usually found on the floor in the lower stories of a building. These spiders like dark, rather damp hiding places. Due to the scarcity of well-documented hobo spider bites, not much is known about them. A wide variety of symptoms have been attributed to hobo bites, but many have not been confirmed. Localized tissue death (necrosis) has been reported, but bacterial infections or other health problems may also be involved.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

1. Teach students to not tease or poke at spiders and to not put their hands in dark crevices without looking first.
2. Maintain tight-fitting window screens. Seal cracks and crevices, including around doors. Brush-type doorsweeps are effective at excluding insects and other pests.
3. Store food products in secure containers with tight-fitting lids. Keep classrooms free of food debris and keep areas under sinks clean and dry. These tactics will help discourage insect pests that spiders may use as prey.
4. Vacuum regularly, including under and behind furniture and in unused corners.
5. Sticky traps can be used to monitor for wandering spiders.
6. Do not store containers, shoes, clothing, or toys on the floor, as spiders may become trapped in these items.
7. Check items brought in from outside storage sheds or garages for spiders or egg sacs.
8. Turn off indoor lights at night to avoid attracting insects to the windows.
9. Pesticides are *not* an effective solution for long-term spider management.
10. *In case of a bite*, wash the wound site with soap and water. Cold packs may help relieve initial symptoms and discomfort. Consult a doctor for further treatment. If a black widow bite is suspected, seek medical help!

Young giant house spiders are often mistaken for hobo spiders, but these spiders are considered harmless despite their somewhat alarming size.

Yellow sac spiders are primarily garden-dwellers, but these active nocturnal hunters frequently venture indoors. They move quickly and are good climbers. Indoors, they are often found along walls, particularly near the wall-ceiling junction. At night, they may become trapped in bedding or in clothing left on the floor, leading to bites when they are disturbed. Their venom may cause localized tissue death in the vicinity of a bite. Yellow sac spiders are rather aggressive and may bite with little provocation. The bite is often reported to be painful, much like a bee sting.

Black widow spiders are shy, non-aggressive spiders despite their frightening reputation. They tend to bite only when threatened, but will then defend themselves vigorously. They prefer dry, undisturbed, dark places such as crawl spaces, unused corners of garages, stacks of flower pots, and lumber piles. The female black widow builds a messy web with very strong, sticky silk. She remains in her web full-time. The female black widow's venom can be a significant health risk for the very young, elderly, or those with high blood pressure.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- *University of Florida IPM (Spiders)*. <http://schoolipm.ifas.ufl.edu/newtp11.htm>
- *University of California Statewide IPM Program*. <http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7442.html>
- *Utah State University (Yellow Sac Spiders)*. <http://extension.usu.edu/files/publications/factsheet/yellow-sac-spiders08.pdf>
- *The National Pesticide Information Center (NPIC) provides objective, science-based information about pesticides and related topics to enable people to make informed decisions. To contact NPIC, call 1-800-858-7378 or visit <http://npic.orst.edu>.*



FOR MORE INFORMATION

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