

Poisonous Spiders In Illinois

by Stanley Rachesky
Extension Entomologist
University of Illinois

Distribution — The black widow spider, a native Illinois species occurring throughout the state, is more abundant in the south half of Illinois than in the north half. The brown recluse spider, first found in 1957 in Jackson County, has now been found as far north as central Illinois. This spider, probably of southern or southwestern origin, may now have become adapted to our Illinois climate.

Symptoms and Injury — Only the female black widow spider bites. This bite feels like a pin prick and is followed by a burning sensation. Although the pain spreads, it eventually localizes in the abdomen or back, where the muscles become rigid from severe cramps. Concurrently there may be nausea, depression, insomnia, tremors, speech defects, and a slight fever. The victim should be kept calm and taken to a hospital or physician for antivenom and other relief medication.

Black widow spider venom is more toxic than that of the prairie rattlesnake, but the effects are considerably less serious because of the smaller quantity of venom injected. Black widow spider bites are becoming less common and the percentage of bites resulting in death is extremely low.

Both the male and the female brown recluse spider bites and injects toxin. Either the bite may not be noticed at the moment or extreme pain may be immediate. However, a stinging sensation followed by pain usually occurs, a small blister arises, the area becomes swollen, and local pain is intense. The tissue affected by the venom is killed and over a period of time gradually sloughs off, exposing the underlying muscles; the edges of the wound then thicken. The bite may take six to eight weeks to heal. The final result is a sunken scar ranging in size from a penny to a half-dollar.

These are typical symptoms of a brown recluse spider bite. However, in some cases, general systemic reactions — occasionally very severe — have occurred. These violent reactions, ranging from a skin rash to severe internal disturbances, may be due to extreme sensitivity or to an over-abundance of venom. In these cases, immediate hospitalization is required.

Description — The female black widow spider is jet black with the red "hour-glass" on the underside of the abdomen. The male usually has yellow red bands and spots over the back.

The brown recluse spider lives in cracks and crevices, spinning an irregular web near the shelter. It prefers to nest in and near homes and buildings.

Control — First and foremost, avoid the bite. Rid premises of piles of rubbish and trash. Be careful when moving piles of lumber and machinery that have not been used for some time. Examine and shake out clothing that has hung unused in closets or other storage areas before you wear it. Be careful when cleaning storage areas.

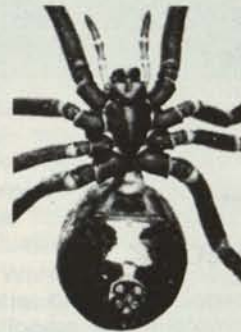
Good insect control is helpful in spider control, as it removes the source of the spider's food. Infested areas may be sprayed with household sprays containing two percent chlordane or five percent DDT. Other household sprays may also be useful in controlling these spiders.

Foundation spraying with two percent chlordane as used for ants may prevent spiders from entering the house.

BLACK WIDOW SPIDER



Female, half natural size



Enlarged hour-glass

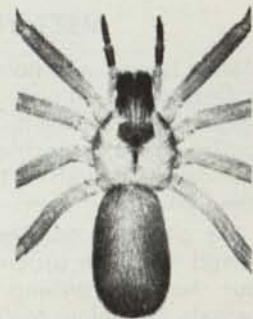


Male, natural size

BROWN RECLUSE SPIDER



Half natural size



Enlarged fiddle

MEETINGS COMING UP

Midwest Regional Turf Foundation Conference — March 4-6, at Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana.
Midwest Golf Course Superintendent Association — March 14, 1968, at the Clayton House Motel, Wheeling, Ill. Be there. 12:00 noon Refreshments, 1:00 P.M. Lunch.

The educational committee has a surprise.

Oliver Miles, Superintendent Joliet C. C., wife gave birth to a baby girl, Angela Marie, Dec. 22, 1967. Oliver said, "it was a nice Christmas present."