

Spiders are natural pest control agents

NEWARK, Del. - A lot of people see the spider as little more than a sinister presence that lurks in dark, cobwebby corners waiting to jump out and grab you. This prejudice no doubt was fostered by the childhood fears of many of us, but it certainly doesn't do justice to the poor spider.

This much-maligned animal is actually one of Nature's best pest control agents, since his whole life is devoted to capturing and gobbling up insects. Because of his fondness for houseflies, small beetles, mosquitoes, thousand leggers, cockroaches and other troublesome insects,

he's definitely on the beneficial list. For the most part, he's also quite safe to have around.

There are about 1000 species of spider in the U.S. With a couple of well-known exceptions - like the black widow, the tarantula, and the brown recluse - most are quite harmless to humans. In fact, says University of Delaware extension entomologist Frank Boys, the spider is a very timid creature who would be quite happy to avoid all contact with people.

Spiders are so familiar to most of us that we tend to take them for granted - unless they get in our way somehow, or unless we have a special phobia for them. But most of us know very little about them, points out Boys. They belong to a class of animals known as arachnids and are closely related to ticks, mites, and daddy longlegs - all of which have eight legs and two body

sections. Insects, on the other hand, have six legs and three body sections.

Spiders are equipped with all sorts of specialized mechanisms for catching insects. Some swing from a long strand of silk onto their prey as it flies by. Jumping spiders can pounce on a bug from several inches away. Fishing spiders can walk on water and even dive below its surface in pursuit of the aquatic insects and small fish on which they feed. Crab spiders are so well camouflaged by their coloring that they can just sit inside a flower blossom and wait for unsuspecting insects to enter. Some members of this last family actually have the ability to change color so that they blend in better with their plant surroundings.

All spiders have spinnerettes, but not all species make webs. The silk for the webs is secreted as a liquid which hardens when exposed to the air. For its size, spider silk is stronger than steel - in fact, during World War II the silk from some spiders was used for making gunsights. Spiders use their silk not only to make webs for trapping insects, but also to line their nests, construct egg sacs and to make "parachutes" on which some tropical species manage to travel great distances.

When it comes to webs, the orb weavers are the great builders among spiders. These boldly marked black

and yellow arachnids grow to more than an inch in diameter and usually can be found hanging upside down in the middle of their large outdoor webs. If you've ever seen one of these webs etched with beads of water early on a dewy morning, you'll understand the orb weaver's reputation as a spinner.

It's unlikely that you'll ever get bitten by a spider, says Boys, unless you're working in a heavily infested area like a deserted building, an old well, or an abandoned pile of lumber. And in that case the spider's probably biting to protect itself. A little extra care on your part will usually avoid the problem.

Though spiders are basically beneficial, there are times when they can become a nuisance. If you're tired of dusty webs festooning the chandelier or decorating the corners of ceilings in otherwise tidy rooms, sanitation is the most practical method of control.

Clean away all webbing with a vacuum cleaner. Housecleaning with a cloth, dust mop or broom will do little to get rid of the source of webs. When removing them, take care to also get the small egg-sacs that may be with them. Be sure to remove the vacuum cleaner bag immediately after use and destroy its contents -

If vacuuming is impractical or difficult, a chemical spray can be used to control spiders instead. Aerosol sprays of DDT (vapon) or pyrethrins are effective in spider knock-down treatments, says the entomologist. Dichlorvos strips (vapon) give good control for several months in rooms with minimal ventilation.


Extensive chemical treatment outdoors is not recommended. Spiders are an important part of the natural population, and their elimination may allow undesirable insects to multiply.

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Duck season reopened

HARRISBURG - The Pennsylvania Game Commission reminds the state's waterfowl hunters that the second, or main, part of the 1978 duck season reopened on Wednesday, November 1.

The early part of the

season had opened at noon on October 11 and then closed at sunset on October 12.

The second (or main) part of the season for ducks, sea ducks, coots and mergansers will close in the state at sunset on Saturday, December 9.



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