



COURTESY OF THE ALABAMA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SYSTEM

Adult female black widow spiders are easy to identify: they have very shiny, long legs and red-orange hourglass mark on their abdomens. According to the Oregon Department of Agriculture, black widow spiders are the most harmful in Oregon, but the amount of venom received from a bite is not usually enough to cause serious reactions in most people.

ASK A MASTER GARDENER

Spiders!

Question: Eeeek! I was cleaning my garden shed and saw this huge black spider. Is it poisonous? Is it a black widow? Should I spray all around my house so I won't get bitten?



Janet Bitter
Master Gardener

Answer: It is getting to be that time of year where everyone gets a little creeped out, but let's get the facts out about the spiders we have in our area.

Most of us aren't thrilled to have a close encounter of the personal kind with a spider, but in most cases, it is nothing to get too excited about.

First of all, there are about 500 species of spiders in Oregon. All spiders have fangs and virtually all have venom. However, most of the research for our state suggests that there are only a couple of spiders which might cause a problem.

For today's article, I am focusing on the black widow spider, the most common venomous spider in our area.

Other potential biting spiders in Oregon are hobo, yellow sac and giant house. We do not have brown recluse spiders in

the Northwest.

Spiders do not seek out a person to bite – they most often bite when disturbed, like if you reach into a dark place and don't realize the spider is there.

The Western Black Widow Spider, *Latrodectus hesperus*, is the species we have in Oregon.

There are other varieties of black widows, as well as brown widow spiders and false black widow spiders. The Western Black Widow spider ranges from British Columbia/Alberta down to Mexico.

Let's get to the creepy part first: What happens if a black widow bites me?

According to the Oregon Department of Agriculture, "Black widows are the most harmful spiders in Oregon. Even so, the amount of venom received from a bite is not usually enough to cause a serious

reaction in most people.

"The venom affects the nervous system, leading to symptoms such as abdominal muscle cramps, nausea, profuse perspiration, tremors, fever, labored breathing, and restlessness. These symptoms often last for only a few days. However, anyone who believes they've been bitten by a black widow should immediately seek medical attention."

Female black widow spiders, at least in the adult form, are easy to identify. They are very shiny with long legs (and honestly do look a little creepy). The females have a red-orange hourglass mark on their abdomens.

Males have a quite different appearance, but also are much smaller and not as likely to bite.

Black widows are usually not in your plants, as their preferred areas are holes, cracks, and clutter. Woodpiles are a favorite location. Since they hunt insects, they prefer to be outside where the hunting is easier.

Black widow webs are also easy to identify – they look very messy with no patterns or structures. They often will



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Black widows are usually now in your plants, as they prefer holes, cracks and clutter.

put a web near the ground to catch both crawling and flying insects, but still will have a retreat such as a hole or crack to use as protection. (Makes those corporate retreats of old seem way less attractive, doesn't it?!)

If you are concerned about spiders inside your home, make sure you have sealed around cracks and windows, remove spider webs from the foundation, eaves, windows and door frames.

Spraying spiders outside with pesticides is not recommended in terms of widespread use. Studies have shown that when spiders are eliminated, more just move in to claim the territories of those removed.

Best strategy is to just

keep them outdoors. Control by spraying is only temporary unless accompanied by housekeeping.

According to Oregon State University, "simpler and far less toxic is a sharp whack with a fly swatter or rolled up newspaper."

Or if it's outside, just hanging out catching bugs, let it be.

Do you have a gardening or insect question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu or 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.