



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO
Hobo spider

Fall spider alert

BONNIE COURTER

Q: What can I do to prepare my garden soil for the winter?

A: One of the best things a gardener can do to enhance the health of their garden soil is to plant a cover crop in mid-August until late September.

Cover crops (green manure crops) protect the soil from rain, loosen heavy-textured soils through their roots, add organic matter, prevent erosion, attract beneficial insects, and often add nitrogen and nutrients that will help plants to grow. Cover crops are grains, grasses, or legumes that grow through the fall and winter, then can be tilled into the soil in the spring to improve tilth and boost nutrients.

After harvesting your summer vegetables, remove all crop residue and weeds, loosen soil with a garden fork or tiller, then sow your cover crop seed. A 20-foot by 20-foot garden will require 1-2 pounds of legume seed, and 3-4 pounds of grass or cereal seed. In the spring, when the ground dries enough for tilling or plowing, mow it, then turn the cover crop under. Don't let it go to seed. Mix the cover crop roots with the soil and let the roots decompose at least 3-4 weeks before planting your spring and summer vegetable crop.

There are many types of cover crops, depending on what benefits are most desired.

LEGUMES

Crimson clover, red clover, hairy and common vetch, alfalfa, fava beans, Austrian winter peas, and soybeans fix nitrogen in the soil.

GRASSES AND CEREALS

These crops reduce nitrogen loss through erosion protection. They are quickly established, and are effective in weed control, as well. They include annual rye, winter wheat, barley, sorghum and oats.

BROADLEAF PLANTS

Instead of leaving areas fallow in the spring, warm weather cover crops like buckwheat, rape, mustard, turnips, daikon radish and oil seed radish can be sown in lieu of a vegetable crop. Simply mow and work them into the soil before they go to seed.

You can find these cover crop seeds and seed mixtures at local garden centers or online. Adding organic matter to your garden soil is a



COURTESY OF MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Crimson clover can be used as a cover crop to replenish nitrogen in garden soil.

continuing necessity, and cover crops are an inexpensive way to do that.

Q: What are these big spiders I'm finding in my house, and are they dangerous?

A: Most spiders in Oregon are not known to be dangerous. Your spider could be a Hobo (*Tegenaria agrestis*) or a Giant House Spider (*Tegenaria duellica*).

Both spiders, accidentally introduced from Europe, can be found wherever people live in Oregon. They prefer living in or around homes and they hitchhike on people's belongings when people move.

They are noticed most often in late summer through early fall, because that's when the males emerge from their normal shelters in search of females with which to mate. In the home, they're usually found somewhere on the floor, but can also be on walls and ceilings, or in cabinets, tubs and showers. They don't make obvious webs and are mainly nocturnal in hunting their prey.

It is often very difficult to tell hobo spiders and giant house spiders apart. Adult giant house spiders are larger than hobos, but often examination under a microscope is required to make a definitive identification.

Mostly harmless and beneficial to gardeners, spiders feed on a wide variety of insects and other invertebrates. The hobo spider has a reputation of being dangerous and aggressive, but that is untrue; it's considered harmless in Europe.

Since symptoms associated with presumed hobo spider bites are not well documented, it is best to treat hobo spiders as if they could cause a medically significant bite. Despite reports to the contrary, the brown recluse spider, known for its venomous bite, does not occur in Oregon.

Normally people are not bitten

unless they come in direct contact with a spider. Spiders only bite in self-defense.

Here are some tips to reduce the number of spiders in your home:

- Seal any small cracks and openings to your home.

- Remove spider webs from eaves, windows and door frames.

- Install good window screens.

- Install gaskets underneath doors that lead outdoors or into garages and basements; seal gaps in window frames with weather stripping, wood putty or sealant; seal gaps around plumbing with construction foam.

- Watch out for spiders if you bring firewood, potted plants or other objects in from outside.

- Keep bedding several inches above the floor.

- Shake clothes and shoes before wearing; shake your bath towels before using.

- Use spider traps — most effective when placed on the floor in dark corners and under furniture

Spraying pesticides is generally not useful or necessary, since most of the available pesticides are effective for only short periods of time. After that, new spiders move in to replace those that were killed.

Spiders have a significant and beneficial place in nature, so respect them. However if you don't care to share your home with them, find ways to prevent their entry or politely help them out the door.

Do you have a gardening question? Please e-mail, call, or visit the Douglas County Master Gardeners Plant Clinic at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu, 541-672-4461, or 1134 S.E. Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.