

HORTICULTURE NEWSLETTER

Jason Graves, Central Kansas District, Horticulturist

September 16, 2011

BEWARE OF SPIDERS - BUT NOT ALL SPIDERS ARE DANGEROUS

The early fall can potentially bring some spider wanderers into your home. So should you worry? Here are a few things to remember as you encounter these interesting creatures.

Spiders actually feed solely on insects and other arthropods and this makes them beneficial in many ways. The problem is that many people get concerned when they see spiders because of many myths and stories.

There are actually not too many spiders whose bite will require medical attention, so take a deep breath as you read on.

Here are some common spiders you may come into contact with this fall. Funnel weaver spiders are commonly found in homes during this time of year. They often produce dense webs on shrubs, grass, or building corners. These spiders are harmless and often mistaken for brown recluse. The difference is that these spiders do not have the characteristic violin marking.

Ground spiders are another common spider found and these usually reside under rocks, logs, mulch etc... as the name implies. These spiders may wander indoors as the weather turns cooler but are harmless to humans.

Cobweb spiders often live in corners around the home and have a bulb like body. They create webs that can be messy and have sticky threads. Most are harmless although one group called the widow spiders are poisonous-but more on that later.

Orb weaving spiders are often busy late in the season as well and can be brown or very bright in color. They have a very large and prominent abdomen that has interesting markings. These spiders make very geometric webs among vegetation or building but are harmless to humans.

So which spiders are dangerous? Well, there are two spiders to be aware of in your home this fall.

Brown Recluse spiders are well known as a spider to avoid. They may live in a messy web in corners of buildings and can be identified by the violin marking that is present directly behind the head. The brown recluse spider has only three pairs of eyes and can be easily mistaken for other spiders as well. It's venom is damaging to human cells and can cause a wound in some people.

Widow spiders as mentioned above can pack a dangerous bite as well. They are often found in window wells, crawl spaces, old burrows, etc... These spiders have red or red-orange markings on the underside of the abdomen. Often the markings look like an hourglass and may appear as two separate triangles. The markings may be bright or faint. These spiders are non-aggressive but if provoked the bite contains a nerve poison that can require medical attention in some cases.

Take action to reduce the chance of unwanted spider pests.

Regular housecleaning is very important in the control of spiders indoors. Large, persistent spider populations indoors indicate the presence of a significant insect population that serves as their food.

Remove clutter from around the home to minimize favorable sites for spiders. Also remove webbing with a broom or vacuum and destroy egg sacs and spiders that are found. Windows and corners and other quiet places are important places to search for spiders.

It is important to eliminate insects that are serving as a food supply for spiders-especially if they are in large numbers. You can often tell what a spider is eating by examining the insects being captured.

Chemical treatments for spiders are an option but usually only in extreme cases and it better to use a professional. Treatments focus on areas behind base-boards, in cracks and crevices, and other places where spiders may hide. General treatments on surfaces and fogs are usually not effective. Most insecticides labeled for ants and cockroaches are also labeled for spiders.