

Brown Recluse Spider



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Only about a dozen species of spiders in the United States are poisonous to people. One of these is the brown recluse spider, *Loxosceles reclusa*. Sometimes referred to as the “violin spider” or the “fiddleback spider,” it is native to the southern and south central states. With the frequent movement of people and their belongings from place to place, its range reportedly is expanding northward toward West Virginia.

Identification

The brown recluse spider is 5/16-inch to 1/2-inch in length, with long, skinny legs. It is tan to light brown in color, with a darker brown, violin-shaped mark starting just behind its eyes. Unlike most spiders, which have eight eyes, the brown recluse spider has only six. The eyes are arranged in three pairs in a semicircle--giving the spider the appearance of having two eyes and a nose.

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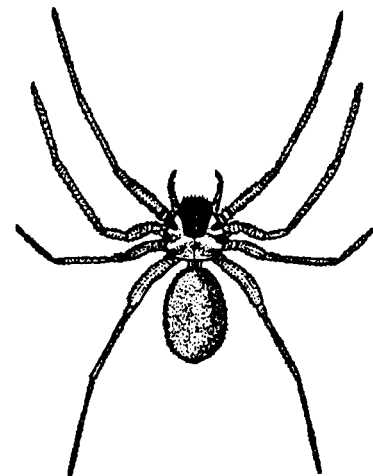
Although the presence of the brown recluse spider in West Virginia has never been officially confirmed, accounts of its distinctive bites exist. The presence in the state of a related species, *Loxosceles rufescens*, was reported in 1993.

Biology and Habits

The life cycle from egg to adult requires about one year. Female brown recluse spiders lay 40 to 50 eggs at a time in 1/4-inch diameter egg sacs; each female can produce one to five egg sacs in her lifetime.

The bite... can result in a deep skin ulcer that takes weeks to heal and leaves an unsightly scar.

True to its name, the brown recluse spider is found indoors in secluded spots—closets, boxes, attics, old clothing, and under furniture. It hides in its irregular web during the day, coming out at night to hunt for insects. Silverfish are reported to be one of its favorite foods.



Brown recluse spider

Although male, female, and immature brown recluse spiders are all capable of inflicting poisonous bites, brown recluse spiders are not particularly aggressive. It is believed that most bites occur when a spider is accidentally trapped while people are trying on old clothing, sleeping in bed, or removing household clutter. Most brown recluse spider bites occur on the arms and legs.

The bite of the brown recluse spider sometimes is barely noticeable at first, but it can result in a deep skin ulcer that takes weeks to heal and leaves an unsightly scar. Brown recluse bites sometimes cause more widespread systemic reactions, particularly in children.

Sticky traps... can be a useful tool both for locating and controlling brown recluse spiders.

If you or a member of your family is bitten, try to collect the responsible spider. If it looks like a brown recluse, apply an ice pack to the bite as first aid and seek immediate medical treatment. Be sure to take the spider along.

Prevention Methods

If you suspect that brown recluse spiders may be present in your house, store clothing and shoes in plastic garment and shoe containers. To avoid possible bites, shake out clothes before putting them on and linens

before using them. Bed skirts and bedspreads should not touch the floor, as spiders are able to climb them during their nighttime hunting excursions.

As a general rule, the more secluded and undisturbed an area, the more the brown recluse spider will like it. Therefore, preventing infestations of brown recluse spiders in and around your house should begin with an inspection to locate seldom-used areas where clutter can be eliminated. You may wish to wear gloves and a long-sleeved shirt while working, just in case you find a spider. If you do happen to uncover a brown recluse spider, remove it with a vacuum cleaner or crush it with a broom, fly swatter, or other tool.

Control Strategies

Sticky traps designed for cockroaches can be a useful tool both for locating and for controlling brown recluse spiders. Place the traps along walls beneath furniture and bathroom fixtures and in closets. If you capture any spiders resembling brown recluse, you may wish to send them to an expert for positive identification before implementing a control program.

Because spiders usually rest in their webs and do not contact surfaces, insecticide sprays are not always effective unless you spray them directly on the spider. A pyrethrin aerosol will provide quick knockdown. For a persistent brown recluse problem, apply a desiccant dust, such as diatomaceous earth or silica gel, to cracks and crevices.

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