

How to identify two harmful spiders

Joseph Parish

We all have sat back in our easy chair and watched the reruns on the discovery channel as they show dangerous spiders from around the world. The quality of their shows is always above reproach. Let us suppose you were given two glass containers which had one spider in each. Your job would be to decide which spider was safe and which one was poisonous. In such a life and death situation you can count on biology to come to your rescue. It is through biology that you can distinguish which of the spiders are poisonous and which one is harmless.

The first reaction when many people see a spider is to shout the words "Kill it." Unfortunately, most of the spiders which a person encounters are harmless and ends up being squished under someone's shoe heel or some other heavy killing device. It is the harmless eight-legged creatures which have to pay the price of the human fear known as arachnophobia. Few people realize that these insects help to rid our homes of more serious bugs such as bed bugs, fleas, flies, gnats and silverfish, among others.

The basis for humans fearing spiders is that most individuals fail to understand the difference between the spiders which are harmless and those which pose a threat to our well-being. A better understanding of these creatures would certainly enable us to peacefully coexist together in harmony. Here is a simple way to help learn about spiders which tend to pose a danger to you. The first spider we will discuss is the Black Widow. This beautiful creature poses the most threat to those coming near it. Second on the threat list is the Brown Recluse spider.



We encounter very few spiders that are as recognizable as the infamous Black Widow. These spiders are a very proficient pest controller and are experts at building their

elaborate webs. Their favorite foods consist of gnats and flies which are just about everywhere. The female Black Widow is easily identified with its red hour glass markings which appear upon their underside. If you see this red identifier as either an hour glass shape or as a simple dot, you can rest assured that you are face to face with a Black Widow spider. The male Black Widows are smaller in size and generally less venomous than their lady companion. Although it has been suggested that the male may not be any more deadly than the common garden spider, I for one do not care to personally find out. The males are thinner and are usually gray or a mottled brown color. Black Widows can be found in any state of the union as long as it has a source of heat, sufficient food and plenty of dark places for it to hide. Black Widows are more likely to be found in the warmer states since in such an environment they can effectively breed as well as catch an abundance of food in the outdoors. There are no known natural enemies of the Black Widow.

If you have been bitten by a Black Widow you will first notice two red marks around the bite area. If venom has been injected into the victim they will experience muscle cramps and spasms at the location of the bite. Fever and nausea will shortly follow. The bite victim should immediately seek medical attention. The patient should be kept calm and heat should be applied to the bite area in order to minimize the spreading of the venom within the body as well as to alleviate any associated pain.



Next, let's discuss the Brown Recluse spider. These spiders tend to have a somewhat smooth appearance as opposed to the other spiders of similar size. Unlike the Black Widow that has a shiny black body, a rather large abdomen and the characteristic red shape on its underside we find the Brown Recluse is easily mistaken and overlooked as a result of its dull colors. Its violin like shape begins near its eyes and points down

toward the spider's abdomen. Experts suggest this is the tell tale sign of the Brown Recluse but unfortunately these characteristics are also shared by several other members of the arachnid family. The foolproof method of identifying the Recluse is to count their eyes. Most spiders will have eight eyes but the Brown Recluse has only a mere six. Anyone feel up to getting that close to the Brown Recluse to verify this?

The Brown Recluse do not travel any further than the Rocky Mountains. They often prefer a quiet, dark and warmer location for raising their families. They frequently travel far less than their cousins the Black Widow. The thought that the Brown Recluse does not have any natural enemy is not necessarily reliable and it is questionable at best. Research shows that perhaps the Jumping Spider and other arachnid have been known to attack and kill the Recluse with great ease. The first symptom that you have been bitten by a Brown Recluse is the red itching skin. The area will quickly develop into a small blister which is followed by the development of an open sore. Eventually the spot will develop a rash of very tiny red dots. You can look forward to fever and nausea occurrences as well. Once again as with the Black Widow get to a doctor immediately. As with the recommendations for the Black Widow bite keep the victim calm and apply heat to the bite. We have all seen the nasty photos of Brown Recluse bite victims where the site of the bite begins swelling up and the dead tissue can be readily seen. These bites can take a very long time to heal and are extremely painful.

Another clue to identifying the Brown Recluse is its web. The Brown Recluse does not spin silk as they are not large web weavers. They will make a web but it is usually close to the ground and resembles tunnels rather than actual webs.

Although we have not covered the dangerous spiders in any detail, we have managed to touch upon the two top villains. I would suggest that you look at images of these two spiders over and over until you can recognize them by sight.