

The Wichita Eagle

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THURSDAY
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Wet summer means
spiders have it good

RIGHT AT HOME

JEN TUTTLE/The Wichita Eagle

Above: A house spider, also known as a cobweb spider, builds a web in the College Hill neighborhood in Wichita. House spiders are not poisonous, but the brown recluse, shown at top, is poisonous and common in the Wichita area.

BY BECCY TANNER
The Wichita Eagle

It started with insane itching. Sandy Purkepile of Derby first thought she had pricked herself with a thorn. She'd been out in the yard working and cleaning her garage.

But then she saw the tell-tale signs of a brown recluse spider bite on her leg — a purple-black spot surrounded by angry red nearly five by eight inches in width.

That was Memorial Day weekend. Her wound is still healing.

Purkepile's experience is a cautionary tale this fall. A wet summer means an abundance of spiders, and they're coming inside now, seeking food and warmth.

"We've had ideal weather for bugs," said Denise Dias, a Sedgwick County Extension agent who specializes in home environments.

She recommends using chemical



Brian Corn/The Wichita Eagle

Sandy Purkepile was bitten by a brown recluse spider Memorial Day weekend, and is only now nearing a complete recovery.

sprays for spider infestations with the ingredients pymethrin and permethrin.

It's been a busy year for Terence McDonald, physician at the Midwest

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How to IDENTIFY SPIDERS



Black widow: Shiny, inky black with a large round abdomen, with red to orange markings that include the shape of an hourglass. Usually one-half inch to one inch in length. Bite is not fatal but can be painful and take a long time to heal.



Brown recluse: Solid light brown about a half-inch long, with a violin-shaped marking. The base of the violin begins at the eyes and the neck of the violin points toward the abdomen. Bite is not fatal, but can be painful and take a long time to heal. Also known as the violin or fiddleback spider.



Wolf: Large, hairy spider can be anywhere from half-inch to 3 inches across. Typically brown or gray with various markings or lines down the back. Bite is not poisonous.

KANSAS.COM

For more information about brown recluse spiders, visit the links attached to this story at Kansas.com.

NEWS 2 USE

See next page for continuation of article.

SPIDERS

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Center for Wound Healing and Hyperbaric Medicine at Wesley Medical Center.

"Whenever we have a rainy season, the number of bites are a lot more," he said.

Spider alert

All spiders release venom when they bite, McDonald said. Kansans should worry about the most poisonous, the brown recluse and the black widow.

Black widows tend to stay outdoors in wooded areas.

The brown recluse is the most common in the Wichita area.

In fact, there's most likely a brown recluse colony in every house and building in the Midwest, said Ludek Zurek, assistant professor of entomology at Kansas State University in Manhattan.

"There is no effective way of controlling them," he said. "You can kill them, but they will come back. They hide in cracks, walls, floors and ceilings."

When he sees a brown recluse in his house, he kills it.

But he also knows the spiders are reclusive and not usually aggressive.

"People need to learn to live with them," Zurek said. "If you are worried, clean up your house; don't have cracks and crevices."

You normally don't see spiders during the day. They come out at night to feed and seek warmth.

Normally, they will leave you alone. But if you have an infestation, some may crawl up the legs of your beds and into your comforters, nesting near soft body parts. When you flinch, they

Now you know

8 PREVENTION TIPS

Here's what you can do to prevent brown recluse spider bites

- 1 Make sure nothing on your bed, such as dust ruffles, comforters or bed canopies, comes in contact with the floor or the walls.
- 2 When picking up dirty laundry don't hold it close to your body. Pick it up piece by piece.
- 3 Wear gloves and a long-sleeve shirt or jacket when cleaning garages or basements.
- 4 Shake out sports equipment such as skates, baseball gloves and bike helmets before putting them on.
- 5 Wear gloves and a long-sleeve shirt or jacket when moving or carrying firewood.
- 6 Be careful when unpacking Christmas items or other items that have been stored for a long time, especially those stored in cardboard boxes. When possible, store items in plastic storage boxes with tight-fitting lids.
- 7 Store items on shelves, not on the floor.
- 8 Eliminate clutter.

Source: Flint Hills, certified pest control technician

flinch. When a spider bites, it actually uses fangs instead of teeth to pierce the skin and deliver venom.

Brown recluses typically bite people on the groin, abdomen, hands, backs of legs or feet.

Their venom can injure blood vessels.

"It stops blood flow," McDonald said. "The actual area where the venom was dies."

For weeks after she was bitten, Purkepile's wound got larger and oozed. She became ill with flu-like symptoms and a rash.

She went to her doctor, but it wasn't until she was referred to Wesley's wound care a month later that her bite began to improve.

"They kept me wrapped up like a mummy for six weeks," she said, wrapped in bandages from her knee to the tips of her toes.

Treatment varies from person to person and by the amount of venom absorbed by the body. In some cases, antibiotics, steroids and antihistamines are prescribed. In the past, some doctors even recommended surgery.

McDonald said it's best to get medical attention as soon as possible and keep an eye on the wound.

"Antibiotics are not helpful," McDonald said. "We don't cut these things out. Don't try to open it. Just keep it cool, clean and dry."

Think like a spider

The best advice for keeping spiders out of house and yard is to eliminate clutter.

Spiders look for places to hide. Outdoors, they will lurk in woodpiles, leaves and garages. Indoors, they look for clothing, shoes and basements.

Flint Hills, owner of the Brown Reclinator pest control firm, recommends homeowners trap spiders with glue traps, which can be bought at most hardware stores.

"Get the sticky traps, not the ones that are black and flat and a quarter-inch off the ground," he said. "To a spider, that's like a 10-foot wall, and they'll go around it."

It's good to know your spiders, Hills said. Wolf and grass spiders eat brown recluses — so it's good to have them in your yard.

But wolf spiders can be disconcerting at first glance.

"I get calls from people saying they've got a tarantula in their closet. They make look scary, but they are protectors of your castle," Hills said.

Some people recommend using foggers to eliminate the bugs and spiders in a house.

The foggers kill only spiders that come in contact with the fog and not afterwards, Hills said. If the spider is hiding in a crack or behind a wall, it will live.

Others recommend vacuuming up spiders and their eggs.

The vacuuming only works if you take the bag out to an outdoor trash receptacle. Otherwise, Hills said, the eggs can hatch in the bag and the newborn spiders can crawl out the vacuum hose.

In the meantime, use caution. This is the spider's best time of year.

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