



Black Widow Spiders Identification and Biology

By DoMyOwn staff

Physical Appearance

- The female has a shiny black body, with a red hourglass marking on her abdomen
- The male black widow spider has a shiny black body with yellow and red bands on its back
- The male black widow has a body about half the size of the female, with legs twice as long

Behavior & Habitat

The black widow is found in almost every state, but is most common in the Southern United States. A particularly unique behavior of the female black widow spider is that she commonly digests her male partner after mating, thus becoming a self-made "widow". Some places black widows may be found are in and around wood piles, under rubbish, around sheds, garages, and houses, or indoors wherever a web can be suspended. The female rarely leaves her web.

Feeding Habits

The black widow spider primarily feeds on insects that wander into its web, not going too far out of its way for a meal. The black widow does not normally bite humans or animals unless it is disturbed or threatened.

Life Cycle

A female black widow spider may produce up to nine egg sacs in a season, each containing 100-400 eggs. The eggs usually hatch after a period of 30 days. Commonly, less than one-fourth of the eggs survive because of cannibalism. Full maturation from nymph to adulthood takes from six to nine months. The female black widow can live for up to five years. The male's lifespan is much shorter.

Damage

The bite of a black widow spider contains venom that is 15 times as potent as that of rattlesnakes. The first sign of a bite is local swelling, often with two red spots in the center. Common symptoms may include aching of the body (particularly the legs), partial paralysis, sweating, and swollen eyelids. Symptoms should disappear in 2 to 3 days. However, **if you believe you have been bitten by a black widow, call your doctor immediately.**

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