

## Seen Any Spiders Recently?

### AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

Abundant rainfall with average or slightly below average summer temperatures usually result in a very good year for insects. Ecosystems work on a predator-prey relationship, or to put it another way, when there is an abundant food source, Mother Nature will develop ways to utilize that food source. Or to put it bluntly, when there are a lot of insects there will be a lot of creatures that feed on insects. Some insects feed on other insects. Birds feed on insects. Lizards, toads and frogs will feed on insects, snakes will even feed on insects. Then there's those creatures that people hate almost as much as snakes and that is SPIDERS!

As we move into fall, we find that at least some of these insects, intentionally or accidentally start to find their way into our homes. Right behind those insects you will often find spiders. On the positive side of this, spiders will eat many of those insects trying to be a nuisance in your home. On the negative side, people often freak out when they encounter spiders.

If you haven't already noticed it, there are a lot of spiders on really ornate webs around yards and gardens. Some of these are rather big spiders. Did I mention that some of these are big, and colorful and if you encounter one of their webs unexpectedly you will learn Ninja moves you didn't even know you could do!

Okay, so don't freak out. While most spiders can bite, only a couple of species in Kansas are venomous (not poisonous, venomous - there is a difference.) Many of the really large ones that are outside are going to die with freezing temperatures in another month or so. In fact many spider species overwinter as eggs in egg sacs tucked away in vegetation or around buildings. But some of the spiders will try to come into our homes in the coming weeks. We also need to be aware that there are several species of spiders that generally live in our homes on an almost year around basis.

The two venomous species of spiders are the brown recluse and the black widow. Black widows are very rare and most likely to be encountered in an outdoor restroom at a park. Let's just say that in over 30 years on this job, I've seen a grand total of just one black widow. Brown recluses, on the other hand, are exceedingly common. I can go into virtually any house in this town and find evidence of, or live, brown recluse spiders. The thing to keep in mind is that the name recluse is well earned. They don't want anything to do with you.

Brown recluse don't spin webs, they stalk and attack. They stay where they aren't disturbed. They like piles of magazines and newspapers. Blankets or towels that are rarely used are favorite hangouts as are stacks of clothes on the floor. Keeping things picked up and off the floor will give them fewer places to hide. Be cautious when moving or opening boxes that haven't been disturbed in a while.

While spiders, even brown recluses, help keep down insect invaders in the home, ultimately most homeowners don't want to deal with them. To reduce the number invading your home this fall, make sure the house is sealed up. Treat foundation areas with a general purpose lawn and garden insecticide. Spray up on the foundation and away several feet from the foundation. Then use a ready to use indoor insect treatment and spray door thresholds, utility entrances into houses and baseboard areas. Insects and spiders tend to stay along the edges of rooms for safety. This same treatment will help reduce other invading insects. We can't stop them all, but we can slow them down and reduce their numbers!