

Late Summer is Spider Time

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

Once the calendar moves into late August or September, you are pretty well guaranteed to start seeing more spiders. These spiders may be in your yard, in your garden, even in the house. I've decided that spiders are in many ways like snakes to many people. Yes, we know they are ultimately beneficial, but I don't want to see them in my house, in my yard, in fact anywhere within 2 to 3 miles of me! While I sort of understand that, I'm just here to give you nightmares and to let you know that you will be seeing more spiders in the coming weeks.

I'm sure that the same things that cause people to dislike snakes cause people to dislike spiders. They surprise us when we are least expecting them and a few of them are venomous, although that is the vast minority of all spiders. I understand the surprise factor. Spiders don't bother me, but I am not fond of walking into spider webs. They just annoy me. I also don't want to make light of the fact that we do have two species of venomous spiders in Kansas. While the bites of either one of them are potentially an issue for some people, let's put this into perspective. Annually we have 5 to 6 people in the US that die of snake bites, 6 to 7 that die of spider bites and 50 to 55 that die from bee stings. Yes, people are bitten by snakes and spiders, but you are at greater risk from bee stings and other "threats"!

In nature everything responds to available resources. The main resource constraints are food, water and habitat; food usually being the biggest constraint. With creatures that have a short life span, short meaning a year or less, they can often take advantage of an abundant food supply fairly quickly. With the rain this summer, there is an abundance of insects. Insects are the food source for spiders. Which explains why we are going to see a lot of spiders this year!

Some of the most obvious spiders in late summer are the orb spiders, usually in the genus *Araneus*, or the often strikingly colored garden spiders, of the genus *Argiope*. These spiders, especially the *Argiopes*, can become quite large and rather unsettling. Both of these groups will spin large webs, often several feet across. These may be knocked down by wind or people every day and rebuilt every night. Unless you are an insect, these species are harmless.

Another group of oft encountered large spiders are the wolf spiders. There are many species of wolf spiders, some of them quite large and they don't spin webs. They are stalk and attack spiders, capturing prey by running it down. These can periodically be accidental home invaders, walking right in the door when we aren't paying attention! Again, unsettling, but not dangerous!

Another group of spiders that becomes very obvious, or at least their webs become obvious, in the late summer are the grass spiders or funnel weavers, family *Agelenidae*. These are the spiders that spin the dense webs, often with a funnel in lawns, weed and shrubs.

Finally we have the two venomous spiders; brown recluse and black widow. Black widows are not common around here, but we do have them. Brown recluse are exceedingly common and can be found in nearly every home. But these require a column of their own.

To keep the other spiders out of your homes exclude them by keeping cracks in foundations and utility entrances caulked up and sealed. Make sure doors and windows fit tight and then treat around the outside of the house with lawn and garden insecticides. You won't keep all spiders out of your house, but you can reduce their number, as well as their food sources, to a minimum!