

# **POISONOUS SPIDERS AND SNAKES IN OKLAHOMA**

It is summer and spiders and snakes come crawling and slithering out by the numbers. Although their numbers are many, only two spiders and half dozen snakes are venomous in our area of Oklahoma. Let's start with spiders.

The two venomous spiders in Oklahoma are the Brown Recluse (aka fiddleback) and the Black Widow. That accounts for only about 1% of all spiders in our area. Many harmless spiders are killed being misidentified as poisonous.

## **Identification, Habitat, and Bite**

**Brown Recluse Spider:** They are brownish color as an adult and whitish color as a juvenile. They are about the size of a quarter when full grown. The legs are a uniform color. They are fuzzy and have protruding eyes. The most evident marking is a fiddle shape on their back with the head of the fiddle facing downward. They are usually found inside a home in dark places. This would include boxes, clothes, closets, bathtubs and beds. They are non-aggressive unless provoked, such as stepping on them, rolling over on them in bed, or putting on a shoe with one inside. At first, their bite might go unnoticed. Then a swollen red spot appears as the blood cells die around it. If this happens, go to a physician immediately. No known anti-venom is available but no known deaths have occurred due to a brown recluse bite. However, serious skin reactions may occur, including the sluffing off of skin.



**Black Widow Spider:** These spiders are characteristically black, shiny and round-shaped with an hour glass shape on their abdomen. They are slightly smaller than a brown recluse, with females being larger. Males can be identified by knobs on either side of their eight eyes. They are usually found outdoors, but can come inside during a drought. Like the brown recluse, they are not aggressive unless they or their egg case is threatened. Only the female black widow bite is poisonous to humans and is the most harmful bite of all spiders, causing paralysis, pain, and convulsions. Seek medical help immediately if bitten. Anti-venom medicine is available. No known deaths have occurred in ten years due to a black widow spider bite.



**SNAKES:** 46 snakes are native to Oklahoma, but only seven are harmful to humans. These snakes are Copperhead, Water Moccasin/Cottonmouth, Rattlesnake (diamondback, timber, prairie and pigmy), and western massasauga. Some poisonous snakes thrive in suburbs while others thrive in water.

### **Identification, Habitat, Bite**

All venomous snakes are identified by a diamond-shaped head. If the head is rounded, it is not venomous. Most of the poisonous snakes in our area are found in moist environments. They also like exposed trash, brush piles, and weeds. An easy snake control measure is to rid your surroundings of weeds and rubbish.

Beware of snakes in water. Copperheads can be found in water as well as Cottonmouths. These snakes can bite under water. Respect the fact that some snakes are beneficial in that they can control rodents; thus, it is very important to identify the snakes in your environment before taking action. There are no known snake repellents. If bitten by a snake, seek medical help immediately as there are anti-venom medications available.

Although spiders and snakes abound in summer, the best thing to do is stay away from them. Snakes typically come out at night, so carry a flashlight and wear shoes, preferably high topped boots. As for spiders, check clothes, shoes, and beds before using them.

For more information on poisonous snakes and spiders, refer to OSU FAQ sheet [EPP-7301](#) or call the master gardener phone line at 918-746-3701.