

Bugs and More Bugs

Do you have an insect in your shop? HAHA - we all do and I'll bet that more than one of them is a spider. Now most spiders are actually harmless. In SWLA there are spiders galore and the vast majority are beneficial as they eat other bugs that we don't like.

Common to Southwest Louisiana are the Brown Recluse. They are hidiers under the boards, behind those cans of finish and in the dark areas of your shop and home.

But spiders vary a great deal in terms of their appearance so you can identify them easily.

First judge how large the spider is by looking at the length of its body and the length of its legs. Check to see if the spider has a body that is one inch or more in length without including the leg span. If it does, then the spider is most likely a golden silk spider, dark fishing spider or a black and yellow garden spider. If the spider has a body that is less than one inch long without including the leg span, you can ignore it. That is, just leave the creature and let her do her work eating the bad bugs.

Check the spider's web, if it has one. If the web has a golden-yellow color to it and the spider is yellow and black with red bands across its legs, then it is most likely a golden silk spider. These spiders are also referred to as "banana spiders" and their bite is poisonous enough to cause blistering and redness. As they will only likely be found in your home among the bananas, you won't have to worry if they are in your shop.

Estimate how long the spider's leg span is. If the leg span is around three inches long, and the spider is a dark brown color with light and dark gray markings, then it could be a dark fishing spider. These spiders enjoy living near water or dark, damp places. They can run across water to hunt for prey, they do not maintain a web and they are just poisonous enough to cause minor redness near their bites. You will see them on the water when you are out fishing.

Check to see if the leg span of the spider is about 2-1/2 inches long, and look for yellow and black markings with a white area near the head. If your spider fits this description, it is likely to be a black and yellow garden spider. Bites result in only mild itching and swelling for a couple days, though it is believed their bites could inject a very small amount of neurotoxin as well. Again - let them go and do their thing.

Do not attempt to measure the leg span for smaller spiders. It is much easier to tell these spiders apart by looking for distinct traits or markings. In Louisiana, these spiders could be brown recluse spiders, Hentz's orbweavers, bold jumping spiders, black widows or brown widows.

Check to see if the spider is brown and smooth with a violin-shaped pattern on its back. If it fits this description, then the spider is most likely a brown recluse spider. These spiders are very poisonous and aggressive, and they enjoy hiding in soft places like the arms and legs of clothing, bedding, or pillows more than any other spider in Louisiana. These are also the ones that likely hide in your shop.

If the spider has a leg span of about an inch and a half long with a very round body, then the spider is most likely a Hentz's orbweaver spider. It is easier to tell when these spiders are around, because they weave huge webs up to six feet in diameter to catch flying insects outside. These spiders are not toxic to humans. Let them do their work.

Look carefully at the spider to see if it is black with a white marking on its back. Also, if the spider is jumping around this is another big sign that the spider you are looking at is a bold jumping spider. These spiders are aggressive and spunky, with a bite that hurts but lacks any dangerous poison. These are cute and they really do work hard to catch bugs you don't like such as mosquitoes.

Look at the coloration of the spider and see if it is black with a red hourglass-shaped pattern on its underbelly. If it is, then it is almost certainly a black widow. These spiders have extremely poisonous venom, and commonly hang upside down from their rough, messy webs. So what do you do - get out your swatter or your Glock and finish them off.

Check to see if the coloration of the spider is brown with yellow-orange dots on its back and a yellow-orange hourglass shape on its underbelly. If it is, then the spider you are looking at is a brown widow. These spiders have even more toxic venom than their black widow relatives, but they inject less of it in their bites. All the same, keep your distance. See the Glock recommendation above (this idea is only for Dick Trough or George Kuffel of course as they are the only people I know qualified to accurately fire a weapon in their shop).

If none of these steps led you to an identification of the spider in question, try sending a picture to a biologist in the area, or contact the Louisiana poison control center if bitten.

Now the final word is that spiders are mostly very scared of you. Most are not particularly aggressive and will not jump out and give you a bite - they just mostly want to be left alone to do their thing of catching other bugs.

If possible, just leave them alone unless they are obtrusive, even in your home. Spiders do what they do and most are very beneficial to us catching those other nasty bugs around. *Barry Humphus.*