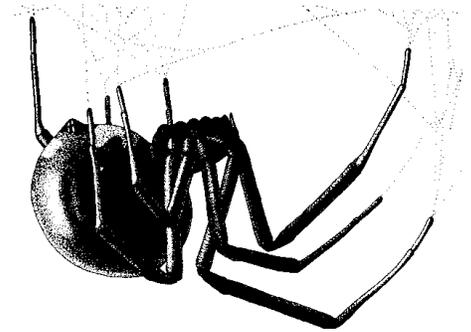




# Western Black Widow Spider



Class	Order	Family	Species
Arachnida	Araneae	Theridiidae	<i>Latrodectus hesperus</i>

## Range

The genus is worldwide. Western Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas north to Canada and west to the Pacific Coast states

## Habitat

Found in tropical, temperate and arid zones in a multitude of habitats.

## Niche

Usually found in undisturbed places like wood piles, outhouses, underneath debris. The web is usually near the ground.

## Diet

**In nature:** predator of any small arthropod its web is capable of holding.

**In culture:** one cricket per week.

## Reproduction

**Growth:** gradual, molts several times.  
**Egg:** produced in bunches of 40 or more, wrapped in silk and suspended from the web, can hatch within a week of being laid.  
**Immature:** pure white after hatching and slowly gaining color with each molt.  
**Adult:** may live for several years. The female can store sperm for many months. It is a fallacy that the female always eats the male after mating.

## Physical Characteristics

**Mouthparts:** chelicerate, fangs are perpendicular to body line. Duct from a poison gland opens from the base of each fang. The mouth and jaws are on the underside of the head.  
**Legs:** 8 long, narrow legs.  
**Eyes:** 8 eyes.  
**Egg:** their eggs are layed in clusters and covered with silk to form an egg sac.  
**Immature:** white at first , gaining color with each molt.  
**Adult:** female is shiny black, with large round abdomen. Male is small (about 1/4 inch) and usually light yellow, red and brown on abdomen. The hour glass on the female is usually red but is sometimes hard to see.

## Common Species

There are five species in North America north of Mexico.

1. *Latrodectus hesperus* , Western black widow spider ( western Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas north to Canada and west to the Pacific Coast states)
2. *Latrodectus mactans* (Southern New England to Florida west to eastern Oklahoma, Texas and Kansas)
3. *Latrodectus bishopi*, Red-legged widow (southern Florida)
4. *Latrodectus geometricus*, Brown widow (cosmopolitan)
5. *Latrodectus variolus*, (New England and Canada south to Florida and west to eastern Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas)

## Special Adaptations

**Venom:** Although never aggressive, the females occasionally bite humans but only in self defense (**males do not bite humans**). They can cause a serious but rarely fatal result. The venom is neurotoxic and is reported to be 15 times as poisonous as that of the rattlesnake. Symptoms include a painful tightening of the abdominal wall muscles, increased blood pressure and body temperature, nausea, localized edema, asphyxia and convulsions. Medical treatment is easily available in modern hospitals. However, only 1,300 bites were reported from

## Sources

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