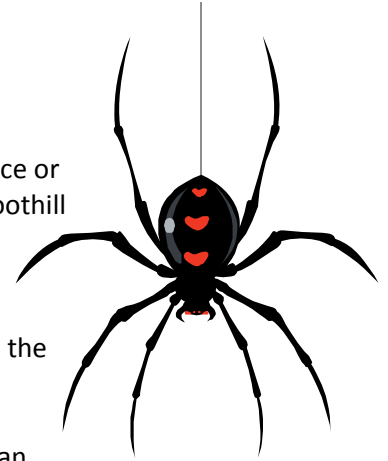


Black Widow Spider Bites are Very Painful

That black widow spider you may have found in your garage, crawlspace or woodpile is far from a lonely old widow. She's got plenty of company in our foothill region. The un-patterned, unsightly webs that black widow spiders build in undisturbed places are smaller than fist-sized, but the bite of the adult female really packs a punch. You'll know if you've been bitten, as even a healthy adult, will develop an intense, wrenching pain—like you've been hit in the stomach.



The initial bite actually feels like a bee sting. Within a few minutes to an hour, the pain intensifies and spreads. Not only is your stomach likely to cramp, but your diaphragm may become paralyzed, making breathing difficult. Other symptoms include leg cramps, nausea, headache or fever. Infants, young children and the elderly are especially vulnerable. Needless to say, a black widow spider bite calls for an emergency room visit.

The adult female black widow spider is 1/2 to 1 1/2 inches long, velvety jet-black, with a grape-shaped body, long spindly legs and a red mark on her abdomen that really does look more or less like an hourglass. You'll almost always find her hanging upside down in her web. Sometimes you'll find that web in the garden—among rocks and under low bushes or shrubs.

Before they mature, female black widows have red or white spots rather than hourglasses and don't pose a human health threat. Males, also harmless, look markedly different than females: they're brown or tan with white-striped abdomens and yellow-striped legs and are only half the size of their mates.

This article adapted from Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service, USDA. Please contact Ken Churches at cdcalaveras@ucdavis.edu or (209) 754-6475 with your agricultural questions. To speak with a Certified Master Gardener: Calaveras (209) 754-2880, Tuolumne (209) 533-5696, Amador (209) 223-6837, El Dorado (530) 621-5543.