



The Brown Recluse

As the name implies, the brown recluse spider (*Loxosceles reclusa*) is reclusive in its habits. The spider hunts at night and retreats to shelter during the daylight hours. Recluse spiders do not catch prey in a silken web, but will use silk to build a retreat to hide in during the day. Most of the time they spend the daylight hours hiding in cracks, crevices, under trash cans, plywood, tarps, in boxes, and in some cases, in clothing and shoes.

Adult brown recluse spiders are yellowish-tan to dark brown, about ¼ - to ½-inch long. The spider has long grayish to dark brown legs covered with short, dark hairs. Distinguishing characteristics are the three pairs of eyes arranged in a semicircle on the forepart of the head and a violin-shaped, dark marking immediately behind the semicircle of eyes with the neck of the violin pointing towards the abdomen.

For a spider, the brown recluse is relatively long-lived. It takes about one year to mature, and lives an average of two to four years. It has also been known to survive for long periods of time (6 to 12 months) without food. Another unfortunate characteristic of the brown recluse is that when you find one, you find many.

Before starting any control effort, first make sure that brown recluse spiders are actually present. Sticky traps are the best way to confirm their presence. Brown recluse spiders move about along walls at night, so placing sticky traps along the walls is the best way to catch the spider.



Photo provided by Ohio State University. Permission for use granted.

When inspecting living areas, start in rooms where spiders have been seen or bites have been received. You may want to wear gloves to avoid accidental bites. Inspect under beds, focusing on cracks under and behind the baseboard. Check drawers and nightstands. Remove items from the closet and inspect stored clothing.

Check vents and light fixtures in the walls and ceiling because spiders that are living in attics and crawl spaces can find their way into living areas by following air and electrical ducts. Inspect storage boxes for spiders, then reseal the boxes so spiders can not enter. These boxes should be stored at least 8 to 10 inches off the floor and away from any walls.

Generally, brown recluse spider infestations originate from outside. Therefore, exterior inspection is an important component of long-term control. Items lying near or propped up against buildings should be removed. Any exterior cracks should be treated with a flushing agent, then filled with an expandable sealer. Outbuildings need to be inspected. The underside of decks can harbor brown recluse, so inspect and treat if they lie too close to the ground.

Even with control efforts, total elimination can be difficult. This is due, in part, to the fact that adult spiders spend little time in direct contact with surface pesticide residues. Usually control efforts will reduce an infestation, and the customer may not see any spiders for long periods of time. In some cases, even whole-structure treatments have failed to eliminate brown recluse spiders. This is usually due to re-infestation from outside sources.

If you have brown recluse spiders, you can practice certain habits to minimize the possibility of bites.

- Most bites occur when a spider is trapped between the skin and clothing. Therefore, clothing and shoes should be stored in plastic bags or boxes.
- Clothing that is not stored in such a manner should be shaken vigorously before putting it on.
- Furniture should be pushed out away from walls and curtains.
- Bed skirts around box springs should be removed and bedding should not be allowed to touch the floor.

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