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**CONTROLLING
THE
BROWN RECLUSE
SPIDER**

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

CONTROLLING THE BROWN RECLUSE SPIDER

The brown recluse spider, *Loxosceles reclusa*, is widely distributed in the United States and is commonly found around homes and farm buildings. Its bite is serious enough to require medical attention.

The brown recluse spider is not aggressive. It prefers to hide in dark quiet places. But it will sometimes bite if handled, or when it is trapped in clothing.

The bite of this pest is especially dangerous to children, to the elderly, and to those in poor physical condition. However, fatalities from the bite of the brown recluse are very rare. Normal reactions usually include intense local pain, a blister, inflammation of the affected area, and an ulcerating sore.

Where It Is Found

The brown recluse spider infests a large geographic area (see map) but its major distribution is in the Southern and Central States. The present known range includes 15 States. Single specimens have been found in Washington, D.C., Arizona, California, Florida, New Jersey, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Wyoming.

This pest is believed to have been in North America for centuries, but until 1957 it was not known to have a poisonous bite. Since then, studies of its biology and geographic distribution have been made, and identical symptoms formerly attributed to "insect bite" are now suspected to have been caused by the bite of the brown recluse spider.

The natural home of the brown recluse spider is in sheltered places outdoors—under rocks and loose bark. But buildings that are dry, littered, and contain many insects are the indoor areas most likely to attract the spider.

Many brown recluse spiders have been found in undisturbed places in basements, attics, water heater closets, storage places, and barns.

A favorite hiding place for the spider is a jacket or other garment left hanging in a barn, outbuilding, or similar structure. For protection, shake these garments before wearing them.

Map shows the regions most heavily infested by the brown recluse spider. This pest is principally found in the Southern and Central States.

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Description

The mature brown recluse spider, also called the "brown spider" or "fiddleback spider," has a body about 3/8-inch long and 3/16-inch wide. Its legspan is about the size of a half-dollar.

The color of the spider varies from gray brown to deep red brown. (See cover photograph.)

The most noticeable mark on the brown recluse

Male brown recluse spider can be identified by bushy palps and small abdomen.

Female brown recluse spider has thin palps and large abdomen. The fiddle-shaped dark area on its back is characteristic of this species.

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is a dark, fiddle-shaped area on the front half of its back. This mark narrows to a thin center line near the abdomen. Unlike most spiders, this species and its close relatives have six eyes, instead of eight.

The female brown recluse spider produces as many as 300 eggs in her lifetime. About one year is necessary to complete the development from egg to mature adult.

Brown recluse spiders are very adaptable. They are able to remain active in temperatures ranging from 40° to 110° F. They may live as long as 2 years.

Effects of the Bite

Reaction to the bite of the brown recluse spider varies considerably and depends on the amount of venom injected and individual sensitivity to it.

The bite is usually followed by intense pain. Sometimes the victim is not immediately aware that he has been bitten, and an hour or more may pass before he experiences discomfort.

The first visible symptom of brown recluse poisoning is a small white blister at the site of the fang punctures. The affected area enlarges and becomes inflamed. It is hard to the touch. Eventually, affected tissues begin to die and peel away. The center of the bitten area becomes sunken and the skin around the bite becomes raised slightly. An ulcerating sore then develops; it may be quite large. Some lesions are so extensive that skin grafts are necessary.

In addition to the local reaction from the venom, victims have been known to suffer one or more of the following effects: rash, chills, fever, bloody urine, weakness, jaundice, and convulsive seizures. These symptoms do not usually occur.

After the healing process is complete, a depressed scar of varying size remains at the site of the lesion. The healing process is usually slow, and 2 to 6 weeks may pass before improvement shows.

What To Do In Case of a Bite

If you think you have been bitten by a brown recluse spider, get immediate medical attention. Keep calm and, if possible, try to find the spider that bit you—positive identification of the spider by an expert can be helpful. The bites of most spiders are temporarily painful, but not dangerous. In the case of the brown recluse, prompt medical treatment is needed to prevent severe reactions.

Although there is no specific antidote for the bite of the brown recluse spider, patients have responded well to treatment with one or more of the following: steroids, antihistamines, and antibiotics.

Immediately after being bitten:

- Apply an antiseptic solution to the fang punctures to help prevent infection.
- Apply ice packs to the area surrounding the bite.

Do not treat the wound as you would a snake bite. Do not cut the fang punctures. Do not apply suction. Do not employ a tourniquet.

Control

The brown recluse spider can live for several months without food. Because of this, the brown recluse is difficult to eliminate by merely controlling the insects on which it preys.

The most effective method of control is to apply sprays or dusts to the spider and its web.

Lindane is effective in controlling this pest in homes and outbuildings.

Household sprays containing lindane are available at supermarkets, home and garden centers, hardware stores, and other retail stores. Some of these sprays can be applied directly from pressurized cans.

Brown recluse spiders are found most often in basements, kitchens, bathrooms, water-heater closets, clothing closets, attics, and storage places. Spray along baseboards; spray behind furniture and pictures, beneath boxes, and other objects that serve as hiding places.

Limit the amount of lindane you use. Do not spray large surfaces such as walls, floors, or ceilings.

Other areas subject to infestation are: barns, outbuildings, garages, woodpiles, and feed storage buildings.

Because of possible fire hazard, do not use lindane sprays at the bottom of water-heater closets; use only lindane dust. Use the dust sparingly. Use lindane dust that contains only 1-percent lindane.

To keep your premises free of the brown recluse spider: dispose of unneeded clothing, papers, and other litter; sweep sheds and storage closets; clean the area around the water heater.

If you live where brown recluse spiders are common, spray or dust with lindane. However, do not apply lindane or any other insecticide unless you have good reason to believe your property is infested.

Precautions

Insecticides used improperly can be injurious to man, animals, and plants. Follow the directions and heed all precautions on the labels.

Store insecticides in original containers under lock and key—out of the reach of children and animals—and away from food and feed.

Avoid inhalation of insecticide sprays or dusts; wear protective clothing and equipment if specified on the container.

If your hands become contaminated with an insecticide, do not eat or drink or smoke until you have washed. In case an insecticide is swallowed or gets in the eyes, follow the first aid treatment given on the label, and get prompt medical attention. If an insecticide is spilled on your skin or clothing, remove clothing immediately and wash skin thoroughly.

Do not apply lindane in poultry and dairy barns. Avoid contamination of animal feed, water, and milking equipment.

Do not apply lindane in feed storage buildings. Rely on frequent cleaning to keep the spiders controlled.

Do not clean spray equipment or dump excess spray material near ponds, streams, or wells. Because it is difficult to remove all traces of herbicides from equipment, do not use the same equipment for insecticides or fungicides that you use for herbicides. Small amounts of herbicides can damage foundation plants.

Dispose of empty insecticide containers promptly. Have them buried at a sanitary land-fill dump, or crush and bury them in a level, isolated place.

NOTE: Some States have restrictions on the use of certain insecticides. Check your State and local regulations. Also, because registrations of pesticides are under constant review by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, consult your county agricultural agent or State Extension specialist to be sure the intended use is still registered.

Use Pesticides Safely
FOLLOW THE LABEL
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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