

VENOMOUS SPIDERS IN FLORIDA

Related Links

Other Sites : There are many websites devoted to spiders. A few are listed here.

- [Spiders And Other Arachnids](#)
- [Spiders On The Web](#)
- [Black Widow Spiders](#)
- [Recluse Spiders](#)
- [Myths of the Brown Recluse](#)

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In Florida there are only two main types of venomous spiders:
[Widow Spiders and Recluse Spiders.](#)

WIDOW SPIDERS:

The widow spiders are worldwide in distribution. Females range from 8-15 mm in body length; males are smaller, sometimes very small (2mm). Most have shiny abdomens that are predominantly black with red markings (although some may be pale and/or have lateral stripes), with moderately long, slender legs. These spiders are nocturnal and build a three-dimensional tangled web, often with a conical tent of dense silk in a corner where the spider hides during the day. In nature, most species are found under rocks and logs, but they readapt to human-altered environments, where they are most commonly found in outbuildings (sheds, barns, privies), water meter holes, nursery cans, and under any item or structure (e.g., barbeque grill, slide, sand box) that has been undistributed for a lengthy period. Formerly, most bites by black widows (almost all by female spiders) occurred in outhouses, but presently, bite occur most frequently when the spider is trapped against human skin, either by reaching under objects where the spider is hiding or when putting on clothing, gloves or shoes containing the spider. Widow spiders are generally very timid and only bite in self-defense when they accidentally contact humans.

There are four species of widow spiders in Florida.

- The Red Widow
- The Brown Widow
- The Southern Black Widow
- The Northern Black Widow

Three species of recluse spiders have been found in Florida:

- The Brown recluse
- The Mediterranean recluse
- The Chilean recluse

The brown recluse has been found in Alachua, Bay, Duval, Jefferson and Leon counties. It typically has a dark violin-shaped mark, although the color is variable.



Brown Recluse (close up of eye)

The Mediterranean recluse has been found in Dade, Escambia, Orange and Osceola counties. It is very similar in appearance to the brown recluse, but the violin mark tends to be lighter in color and has parallel sides.



Female Chilean

The Chilean recluse has only recently been found in Florida, in Polk County. It is the largest and most dangerous of the recluse species. The violin mark of this species is dark and wider in front than behind.



Male Chilean

RECLUSE SPIDERS

The recluse spiders (also known as violin, fiddle back, or brown spiders) belong to the *genus loxosceles* (Family: Sicariidae). These spiders are found worldwide, most commonly in the tropics with some species reaching temperate latitudes. Recluse spiders are medium-sized (6-12mm body length), with uniformly-colored abdomens that can vary from a tan to dark brown. In many species there is a characteristic darkened violin-shaped pattern which occurs on the front half of the head region. However, other unrelated spiders may have a pattern which can easily be mistaken for the violin.

A more useful method of determining recluse spiders is by using the eye pattern. Most spiders have eight eyes arranged in two rows of four, but recluse spiders have six eyes arranged in three pairs –(dyads), with one anterior dyad and a lateral dyad on each side. Some related spiders, particularly spitting spiders (which have a unique domed head region), have a similar eye pattern, but these are otherwise different. Recluse spiders make a protective silken retreat, but they are usually hunters that leave the web in search of the prey. They can be abundant in human structures. Similar to widow spiders, recluse spiders usually bite only when they become trapped next to the victim's skin.

Bites occur either when sleeping humans roll onto the spider or put on clothes into which the spider has crawled. Recluse bites range in intensity from no noticeable effect to severe necrosis. Typical symptoms are as follows: Symptoms start 2-6 hours after the bite. Blisters frequently appear at the bite site, accompanied by severe pain and pronounced swelling. A common expression is the formation of a reddish blister, surrounded by a bluish area, with a narrow whitish separation between the red and blue, giving a "bull's eye" pattern. By 12-24 hours, it is usually apparent if a wound is going to become necrotic because it turns purple in color. If necrotic symptoms do not express by 48-96 hours, then they will not develop. If the skin turns purple, it will then turn black and cells die. Eventually the necrotic core falls away, leaving a deep pit that gradually fills with scar tissue.

The red widow has a black abdomen with a single flattened red triangle on the underside. On the top are rows of red spots, each of which are surrounded by a yellow circle. The head region and legs are red-orange in color. The web begins as a typical tangle web in the interior of a small palm or palmetto, but then continues as a sheet of silk onto one of the lateral open leaves. It lives in sandpine scrub from Marion County to Martin County.



The brown widow is highly variable in color. It may be almost white to almost black. Typically, it is light to medium brown, with an orange hourglass marking on the underside of the abdomen. The segments are banded, with one half of each segment lighter in color than the other half. The back often has a row of white spots and there are few white stripes on each side. The egg sacs are tan, spherical and have many small tufts of silk sticking out of them. They resemble a sandspur. The other widows make white, smooth egg sacs that tend to be pear-shaped. They are extremely timid and rarely have been reported to bite. It may be extremely abundant on houses and other man-made structures. It reproduces frequently and disperses rapidly making it nearly impossible to control.



The southern black widow is the most common of the native widow spiders. It is the epitome of the classic widow spider, occurring in all the normal widow spider habitats. It is a glossy black color including the body and legs. The only red marks are the bright red hourglass mark on the underside of the abdomen, and a red spot just behind and above the spinnerets.

The northern black widow is very similar to the southern black widow, except its hourglass mark is broken into 2 triangles-shaped markings, and there is a row of red spots down the middle of the back. It has only been reported from the Florida panhandle. Its web is a large tangle mass placed at the tip of a low tree branch.

