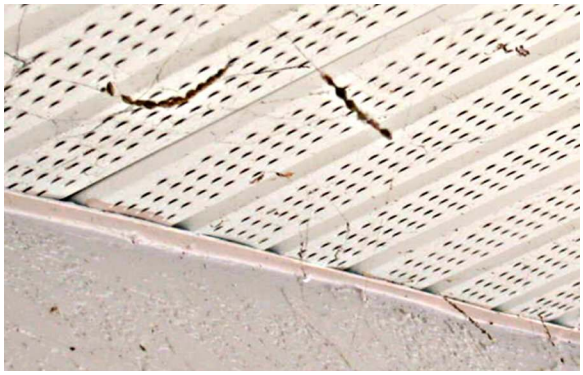
UF UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA
IFAS Extension
Collier County

Collier County
A Public Services Department
Horticulture
Solutions for Your Life

Eight-legged Lanai Encroachers…..Spiders!

Dr. Doug Caldwell, Commercial Landscape Horticulture

A spineybacked spider, *Gasteracantha cancriformis*, feasts on a captured dragonfly (left photo, D. Caldwell). A brown widow with classic red hourglass on belly (right photo, F. Santana).



Garbageline spiders (*Allocyclosia bifurca*) make string cobwebs (above) that contain several egg sacs. Note spider hanging at bottom in photo at right.

It turns out that one of our very favorite places to relax, the ubiquitous, screened-in, Florida lanai is a favored environment for several spider species. This co-habitation can get a little unnerving if you don't exercise some control tactics. Because these encroachers are small and shy, one needs to diligently scout this environment and apply control tactics to make sure that they don't take over. Some common arachnids you may encounter are the garbageline, spineybacked, cellar and many others.

One spider which I passed over for years is the garbageline spider. I thought that the bedraggled droopy strings were old spider webs, until I knocked some down and saw the little guys at the end of the string of egg sacs. These are a nuisances spider that contributes to the cobweb clutter.

A species of more serious concern and also very common, is the brown widow, and when I find it, there are typically colonies of these venomous spiders hanging around. I have had two encounters with huge populations, one outbreak on a front porch and another all over the pool cage inside a lanai area. With both of these encounters the abundance of the brown widows reminded me of an 'Indiana Jones', movie-like epic! It even "creeped" me out, an entomologist! The brown widow builds its web in secluded, protected sites around our homes, under the pool cage support bars, garages, behind hurricane shutters, recessed hand grips of plastic garbage cans, undercarriages of motor homes, underneath outside chairs, branches of shrubs. Feeling safe?

The brown widow comes in many shades, from almost white to almost black. They are usually light to medium brown with the classic orange hourglass on their "belly". There are variable spots, and maybe some wiggly white stripes. The tan egg sac is unique in the spider world and the best way to identify the brown widow. It is about the size of a pea with stubby spikes, like one of those medieval weapons.

The bite of a widow spider is much feared, but fortunately, these spiders are generally non-aggressive and will retreat when disturbed. Bites usually occur when a spider becomes accidentally pressed against the skin of a person when putting on clothes or sticking their hands in recessed areas or dark corners. Dr. G.B. Edwards, an arachnologist with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, in Gainesville, states that the brown widow venom is twice as potent as black widow venom. However, they do not inject as much venom as a black widow, are very timid, and do not defend their web. The brown widow is also slightly smaller than the black widow.

Bite symptoms are systemic, spreading through the lymphatic system, and usually start about 1-3 hours after the bite. The most common symptoms are intense pain, rigid abdominal muscles, muscle cramping, malaise, local sweating, nausea, vomiting, and hypertension. If left untreated, *Latrodectus* bite symptoms usually last 3-5 days. Calcium gluconate and/or antivenom may be administered to relieve or counteract symptoms.

Dr. Fred Santana, Sarasota County Extension, provides the following excellent advise at http://sarasota.extension.ufl.edu/IPM/BrownWidow.htm. "Sanitation is the most important strategy in reducing spiders infestations around the home. Routine cleaning is the best way to eliminate spiders and discourage their return. Gloves should be worn if you suspect widow spiders to be present. Reducing clutter makes an area less attractive to spiders. Inside a home or garage, a thorough cleaning with a vacuum cleaner is an effective way to remove spiders, their egg sacs, and webbing. When vacuuming, the vacuum bag should be removed when you are finished and placed in a sealed plastic bag for disposal. This should be followed by regular inspections to insure they have not returned. Outside the home, potential hiding places such as firewood, building materials, and other debris lying on the ground should be moved away from the building or eliminated. Any cracks, holes, or spaces around windows and doors should be sealed or fitted with weather stripping." Author's note: If you don't like the thought of using your home vacuum and dragging its electrical cord around the lanai, use a stick and squash the spider and dip the webbing and egg sacs into strong soapy water and flush them down the toilet.

"If a spider problem still exists after sanitation work, insecticides may have to be used. Direct contact with a non residual aerosol spray will remove live spiders when a vacuum is not available. Spot treatment applications of a residual insecticide to locations where spiders build their web sites can be helpful and prevent new spiders from becoming established. Where it is not feasible to vacuum, such as outdoors, an insecticidal dust can be very effective. Dr. Philip G. Koehler, University of Florida, reports that dusts cling to webs for long periods. When spiders reportedly chew their webs to recycle silk, they consume the toxicant and die." For recommended pesticides, see: http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/MG206 . For more on venomous spiders see: http://www.doacs.state.fl.us/pi/enpp/ento/venomousspiders.html .

Doug Caldwell, Ph.D., is the commercial landscape horticulture extension agent and landscape entomologist with the University of Florida Collier County Extension Service. The Cooperative Extension Service is an off-campus branch of the University of Florida, Institute of the Food and Agricultural Sciences and a department of the Public Services Division of Collier County government. E-mail dougbug@ufl.edu ; phone, 353-4244 x203. Extension programs are open to all persons without regard to race, color, creed, sex, handicap or national origin. For updates on Southwest Florida Horticulture visit: http://collier.ifas.ufl.edu