

Dear IPM....

There are a lot of large spiders in my crawl space, and I'm concerned that some of them might be poisonous hobo spiders. What can you tell me about spiders in Alaska?

Spiders are constant participants in Alaska's food web, they are almost always considered "beneficial" in gardens or landscapes where they are a natural form of pest control. While spiders often evoke fear when we see them around the house, there are no significantly poisonous spiders whose natural range includes any part of Alaska. While banana spiders or black widows occasionally get a ride up here as stowaways on food shipments, **there are no documented cases** (preserved specimens positively identified by an arachnologist) **of hobo or brown recluse spiders anywhere in the state.**

There are many different types of spiders found in Alaska, some of which may take up residence in your house. Most often when you see a spider crawling around a dwelling, it is a wandering spider actively foraging for food: insects or other pests that might also have found habitat in your house. Another common type of spider is a web weaver, which finds an undisturbed out of the way place to build a web and catch insects that way.

Spiders are generally very difficult to identify, sometimes even the males and females of the same species look different! Identifying a spider by color or even a picture from a book or website is almost impossible. Many spider ids involve using a dissection microscope to look closely at the palps (like antennae); only an arachnologist can positively identify a spider specimen.

Why are there spiders in my crawl space in the first place?

Spiders are predatory arachnids, and they are likely in your crawl space because there are insects there that they can feed on. They are helping to control insect populations in your house!

I understand spiders' beneficial roll in the environment, but I still don't want them in my crawl space. What do I do?

There are several ways to decrease spider populations indoors. Removing clutter from the floor is a good start, as clutter offers safe hiding places for web weaving spiders. Remove webbing and spiders. You can use a vacuum to do this and just discard the bag, or capture them live to relocate them outside! Eliminating other insect pests will make the crawl spaces or house very unappealing for a spider, as that's the reason why they're there in the first place. Sealing all cracks, windows and doors prevent insects and spiders from finding a way into your home. Also, identifying the insects in the webbing can help pinpoint a pest that might need additional control.

Contact pesticides are usually not the most effective control for spiders, as the chemicals are not active against all stages of the spider life cycle. Until the food source (insects) is removed, spiders will continue to inhabit the area.