

How to Love Spiders

By Comfort for Critters

Arachnophobia is the most common creature-based phobia on the planet - though it clearly doesn't bother me. For some reason I've always had a fascination with spiders. I don't find them creepy, even as I peer into their four sets of eyes, or watch them scurry on their eight, sometimes hairy, legs. I see God's creativity, and in some cases, sense of humor.

My husband though doesn't share this arachnid-passion with me, so for now, I won't be adopting a little Aragog (Harry Potter reference, I couldn't resist) any time soon. I have to settle for the stuffed, fake spider which I use to prop open my office door (yes, it's that big).

I've read in various places that wherever you are, you're always within seven feet of a spider, or five feet, or even three. It could be an urban legend...but I prefer to think they're just getting closer. It is a fact that the vast majority of the spiders which will (yes, will) cross your path are completely harmless.

Arachnologists have classified over 45,000 different species of spiders, and get this, they guess that there's another 45,000 other kinds out there. In North America, there are really only two types that are harmful - the brown recluse and of course, the black widow. The other 89,998 types are your friends, or at least they want to be.

The literature goes a step further and describes spiders as beneficial to all of us. They are the number one fighter against the world's most fatal disease (malaria), as they feast on mosquitoes. I've yet to see anyone give them credit though. If malaria isn't on your radar, maybe your garden is. When they're not chowing down on mosquitoes, they're targeting those nasty bugs which love to damage your garden plants. Spiders should be the best friend of organic gardeners for this very reason.

They should be the best friend of any sort of gardener in fact. They eat far more insects than any bird, and can even feel their way to locate the tiny insects birds would never see. They also eat insect larvae, protecting crops, humans and pets, from dangers that haven't even hatched (now that's proactive!). In addition, research is underway to develop organic pesticides, which are based on spider venom. They are deadly to insects, but harmless to all other creatures and the environment.

Maybe one reason I've always appreciated spiders is that I see them as the underdog. Any unidentified "bite" on a person is often diagnosed as a spider bite, though these are extremely rare. These bites are almost always from mites, fleas and bedbugs.

In fact, spiders will only bite as a last resort, when they feel threatened in some way. Despite their multiple sets of eyes, they have terrible eyesight (very funny, God). They really don't even see you, until you're a foot away (literally and figuratively). Remember, they're out hunting insects, not

humans who are at least a million times their size. When you see them scurry into a corner after you flick on the light, this should really tell you something about their level of aggression.

To me they're a wonder of creation, representing diversity and the imagination of our creator. They're impressively flexible too, living in all ecosystems, from tropical rainforests to the Gobi desert. The only place on earth where they don't make their home is Antarctica, and who can blame them for that? They've even stood the test of time, creeping along before dinosaurs and still showing up on your bedroom ceiling (at night, with the lights out).

On top of all that, they spin beautiful webs, which any crafter has to admire. They start with a silk that scientists are now studying and frantically trying to copy. Pound for pound, it is stronger than steel, yet completely flexible. Pretty impressive. Spiders are even able to produce varying types of silk to spin webs, which are as complex as they are beautiful. Their webs are also quite useful. Some are solely to catch prey, others for wrapping prey, and others just to walk on. Trapdoor spiders can even build a door (complete with hinge) using overlapping webs. And they spin their creations with no instructions!

Just as we're finally coming around to realize the value of bees in our ecosystem (hopefully not too late), I believe the day will come when spiders get the credit they deserve too. Think about it...would you rather see a spider calmly walking along your ceiling or about two thousand mosquitoes ready to descend? I rest my case.

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