

Cob Web Spiders and False Widows

Scientific Name: *Steatoda* spp.

The false widow is a close relative of the black widow (same family) and is common in the home throughout the year. However, it is harmless to humans.

Description

There are several *Steatoda* species present in Montana. The species *Steatoda grossa* and *S. hespera* are the most common. The adult female resembles the adult black widow in size and shape. Both the female, male, and immature false widow spiders are dark brown with variable lighter markings on the abdomen (females $\frac{1}{5}$ - to $\frac{5}{16}$ -inch; males $\frac{1}{8}$ - to $\frac{1}{5}$ -inch), and no hourglass is present on the underside of the abdomen (Fig. 1). Similar to black widows and other members of the comb-footed spider family, they hang upside down in their webs and have large, bulbous abdomens.



Figure 1. Female *Steatoda* species hanging upside down in her web. Photo by R. Carlson

False Widow Behavior

- Webs are built near the ground, normally around rocks, logs, or boards.
- Some build webs underneath overhangs around furniture and buildings.

Management

Non-Chemical Control

- Modification of any of the habitat surrounding the home is critical to keep spiders from entering. Eliminate any potential burrowing sites close to the entrance of the home, including wood piles, rock piles, brush, and firewood.
- Install door sweeps, and seal cracks and crevices around home entrances and the foundation. Spiders can also be removed by vacuuming. Vacuum around window wells and other entrances to reduce potential prey sources and any webs that are created.
- Sticky traps can be placed around home entrances and areas where spiders reside including crawl spaces, bathrooms, and basements. Reduce clutter in these areas to eliminate potential hiding spots.

Chemical Control

Sprays can be used outdoors where spiders might be entering, targeting areas around entrances, including doors, windows, vents, and garages. Insecticides labeled for indoor use (mostly pyrethroids, such as those with the active ingredients bifenthrin, permethrin, and cyfluthrin) can be used as a last resort to control spiders if large numbers are present within the home. Bug bombs are not effective for controlling spiders in the home and are not recommended.

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November 2022