

Q: I have brown recluse spiders in the yard. How can I get rid of them safely?

A: The short answer is that brown recluse spiders are not found in California except in the far southern eastern desert regions, and it is highly unlikely that you have a population in your backyard. As of now, there has not been one confirmed brown recluse spider bite in the state. Leaving facts aside, the internet is full of scary stories about these spiders, which can be found in the south central Midwest from Nebraska to Ohio and south through Texas to Georgia, but not here.

If you want to find out what kind of spider you have, catch several. Look closely, as one of the key identification features are the eyes. Unlike most spiders who have eight eyes, arranged in two rows of four, recluse spiders have six eyes arranged in three pairs. Spitting spiders and the woodlouse spider share this eye arrangement, so this feature alone is not diagnostic. Some publications will tell you that a violin shaped mark on the cephalothorax – the first part of the body behind the head- is diagnostic. Unfortunately, the presence or lack thereof varies widely and can easily lead to misidentifications. Many common spiders have dark markings on their head, confusing people into thinking they have found a recluse. While you are looking so closely at this little spider, see if the abdomen and legs are covered in fine evenly colored light tan to dark brown hairs. Non-recluse spiders have stout spines on their legs. Virtually every one of the hundreds of species of brown or light brown spider in California has been confused with the brown recluse. True ID requires the dissection of the spider by an Arachnologist. If you would like more information check out <http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7468.html>

It is important to remember that spiders do not consider us a food source, biting only when threatened or provoked. The venom of all spiders is poisonous, but most spiders have such small fangs that they cannot penetrate human skin. If you are bitten by one of the few spiders that can, reactions vary widely from little to no reaction, to swelling and itching similar to a bee sting. If you have a stronger reaction such a increasing pain, or dramatic swelling, contact you physician or a poison control center. It is even more important to remember that spiders are one of the best friends that gardeners have, eating many of the pest insects that can cause problems on our precious plants. Take them outside if they enter your home, and tell them to get to work!