



Jumping Spiders

Jumping spiders belong to the family Salticidae, of which there are about 4,000 species worldwide (300 in the United States). All species are relatively small, usually less than 2 cm, but for their size they are extraordinary jumpers. These spiders are known for jumping 10 to 40 times their body length. Many species are brightly colored, especially their chelicerae (mouth parts).

One of the most fascinating things about jumping spiders is their vision. Most spiders are not known for their vision because they catch prey on webs, and so instead have a keen tactile sense for detecting vibrations. Jumping spiders, on the other hand, do not construct webs for catching prey. They actively hunt during the day, sneaking up on and catching their prey. Jumping spiders have eight simple eyes (not compound, as in insects); this includes one pair of especially large eyes on the front of the cephalothorax. These larger eyes have excellent resolution and are stereoscopic, like our own eyes, for detecting distance. The smaller eyes are less sensitive and may be good at detecting motion. Jumping spiders cannot move the lens of the eye, but are able to rotate the retinas within their eyes. Because the retina is the darkest part of the eye, as it moves the eye appears to change color, and you are able to see the spider track your movements.

Jumping spiders are carnivores and can be useful garden predators. They eat insects and other spiders. They do not spin webs for catching prey, but may use a silken thread as an anchor as they climb down a vertical surface. They are generally harmless to humans, although there are some reports of small bites that range from asymptomatic to small, mosquito-bite sized welts.

