

Recluse Spiders



Brown recluse spider. Photo by Rick Vetter, UC Riverside.

Recluse spiders, members of the genus *Loxosceles*, are relatively small brown spiders with long slender legs and a distinctive darker brown, violin-shaped mark on the back of the cephalothorax (first body segment). Recluse spiders occur throughout the southern United States, as far south as Chile.

The Brown Recluse spider, *Loxosceles reclusa*, does not occur in established populations in northern California nor even near California, although imported individuals have rarely been collected in Riverside Co. A different species, *arizonica*, which is widely distributed in Arizona, may occur as far west as the California border. *Loxosceles unicolor* occurs in extreme southern California. *Loxosceles laeta*, a tropical species, was recently introduced and is now established in a very restricted area of San Diego Co. Another species, *rufescens*, occurs in the Great Basin region of southern Nevada and Utah. In the past 30 years there have only been four instances of *rufescens* being transported into central California in cargo, crates and boxes. All of these were found in warehouses or commercial storage areas in low elevation communities in the Central Valley, and none became established. No populations of recluse spiders occur in northern California. Recluse spiders may rarely be transported to new locations but almost never establish permanent residence.

Recluse spiders, as their name implies, are very shy and are found in sheltered locations, generally beneath objects that are rarely moved. In warmer climates they also occur under rocks or fallen wood. Recluse spiders make an irregular

loose sac in the web. Encountering a recluse spider in the home is very unlikely, and even less so in bedding or clothing. In any case these are not aggressive spiders, and they will bite only under extreme provocation.

Recluse spiders are among the most maligned of all spiders. The popular press and other sources often report highly sensational "Brown Recluse bites" on persons that reside in regions where the spider does not even occur. Numerous syndromes blamed on their bite generally lack any real evidence of their involvement. In actuality recluse venom at most causes a localized, slow-healing sore at the site of the bite.

The bite itself frequently causes an initial sharp stinging sensation which quickly goes away, to be followed by other symptoms two to eight hours later. Later symptoms are variable ranging from mild pain and redness to a localized open sore, and perhaps very rarely, systemic deep tissue disease. Normally the bite is marked by a red zone that forms around a gradually enlarging open sore. The sore will continue to grow and deepen to perhaps the full thickness of the skin over a period of days or weeks and reach the diameter of a dime. This sore may take as long as 3 to 4 months to completely heal. Although various medical treatments have been used or suggested, none has been demonstrated to be effective in cases of true recluse spider bites.



Staph infection misdiagnosed as brown recluse spider bite. Urbanlegends.about.com.