



Spiders – you either like them or loathe them!

If you really like them, they're a fascinating group of animals to investigate, and many species are easy to find in our houses and gardens. There is so much we don't know about spiders that anyone can make new discoveries with a bit of patience and careful observation.

But first it is important to identify your spider. Help is at hand, but be warned that although many spider families have common names, most species do not. The Field Studies Council publishes a whole range of fold-out charts on the identification of a wide variety of plants and animals, and one of them is *A Guide to House and Garden Spiders* (cost at present: £3.00). This has wonderful colour paintings of 40 of the more recognizable spiders you are likely to see indoors or lurking in your garden. It also describes where to look for them and some of the features that help in their identification.

For example, *Pardiscura pallens*, a member of the comb-footed family, is only a couple of millimetres long and lives under the leaves of trees such as holly, oak and sycamore (and even privet hedges). However, it's often not the spider you spot first, but its amazing egg sac. This is pure white, very spiky and much larger than the spider itself.





Later in the year spiderlings emerge, leaving a neat hole in the side of the egg sac. No other species in Britain produces an egg sac like this so it's a dead giveaway.

A guide to house and garden spiders

Measurements relate to body length excluding legs

1. Orb web spider
Araneus quadratus
♀ 12mm (can go up to 15mm)

2. Comb-footed spider
Paidiscura pallens
1.5-2mm

3. Labyrinth spider
Agelena labyrinthica
♀ 12mm

4. Running crab spider
Philodromus dispar
5mm

5. Buzzing spider
Anyphaena accentuata
♀ 6mm

6. Orb web spider
Cyclosa conica
♀ 7mm

7. Mesh webbed spider
Dictyna arundinacea ♀ 3mm

8. Orb web spider
Metellina segmentata
♀ 7mm

9. Crab spider
Diaea dorsata
6mm

10. Orb web spider
Araniella cucurbitina
♀ 6mm

11. Jumping spider
Heliophanus flavipes
♀ 6mm

FSC Low bushes and vegetation (including flow

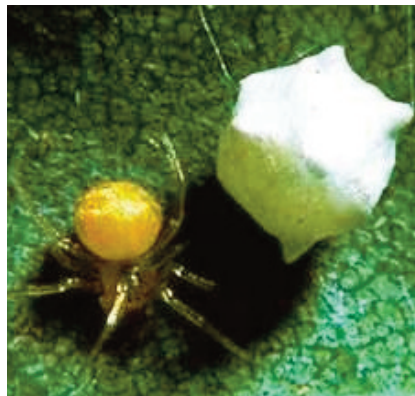
Some spiders on the chart can vary in colour, so beware. The orb-weaving 'four-spot garden spider', *Araneus quadratus*, is found on tall grass and bushes such as gorse. Individuals can be yellow, reddish, brown or even almost green, although fortunately the four white spots on the abdomen are usually clear. Over 50 years ago it was suggested that adult females of this spider can change colour to match their background, although I don't think anyone has looked at this properly. Now there's an idea for you to follow up! The more common cousin of the 'four-spot garden spider' *Araneus diadematus* (the 'garden cross spider') is also very variable for colour. As its common name suggests, this species always has a white cross on its back.



LEFT: Two individuals of the 'four-spot garden spider', *Araneus quadratus*, showing the marked variation in colour.

Note the tell-tale four white spots. _____

BELOW: The tiny *Paidiscura pallens* with its larger, spiky egg sac.





The FSC chart also shows some of the various types of webs built by British spiders. Although many species do not spin webs to catch food, for those that do, the form of the web can be a big help with identification. For example, a fine, orb web spun outside your window is not going to belong to a jumping spider, a large house spider or a wolf spider. If the web has a segment missing you're home and dry; only *Zygiella x-notata* builds a web like that on buildings.

The species mentioned above are pretty distinct because of their appearance, or because of the form of their web or egg sac. However, it is important to remember that some of the 660 spiders in Britain look very similar. For example, the 'woodlouse spider', *Dysdera crocata*, has a very close relative, *Dysdera erythrina*, which is almost identical. Both have the same coloration and the very large jaws necessary to pierce the tough armour of their woodlouse prey. Here is a photo of *Dysdera crocata*, out hunting:





Likewise, the beautiful comb-footed spider *Enoplognatha ovata* (we call this one the 'candy-stripe spider') with its three, distinctive red and yellow colour patterns has an exact look-alike, *Enoplognatha latimana*. And then there are the hundreds of very small, brown 'money spiders'... So, how can you be absolutely sure which species of spider you are looking at? To do that you'll want an identification book that shows the sexual bits of mature spiders which, in the majority of cases, differ between species. You'll also need a good microscope, a lot of patience and, usually, a preserved spider.

But for now, choose a warm sunny day, clutch your *Guide to House and Garden Spiders* and enjoy a spider safari.

Geoff



Geoff will be writing more about spiders in future issues of this Magazine. Meanwhile, here are some sources of information on spiders:

British Arachnological Society website

www.britishspiders.org.uk

(Arachnology is the study of spiders, scorpions and their friends)

Where to get the FSC spider chart:

Online: <http://www.field-studies-council.org/publications/pubs/house-and-garden-spiders.aspx>

or

Write or telephone the **Field Studies Council**, Preston Montford, Shrewsbury, Shropshire, UK, SY4 1HW

Tel: 0845 3454071 (Local rate phone call - UK only); +44 1743 852100

The Invicta Arachnid Club

[http://www.invicta-arachnid-club.co.uk/](http://www.invicta-arachnid-club.co.uk)

This is a Kent based local group that is very active and is affiliated to the Bug Club, as is the British Arachnological Society