

# Garden spider

(*Araneus diadematus*)

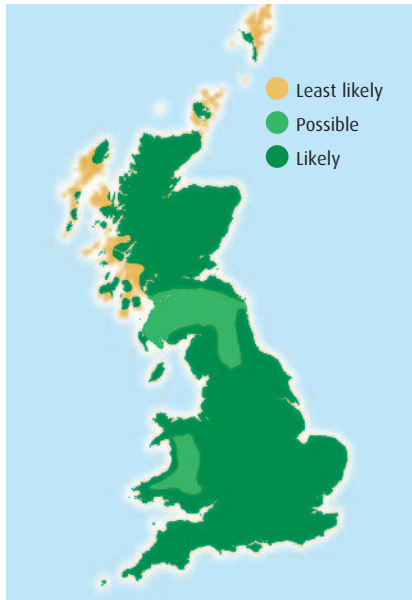


Advancing Arachnology

## Where are they?

The Garden spider is probably the most common and widespread large spider in Britain. It's certainly not restricted to gardens and can be found in many different habitats, from woodlands and heaths to urban environments, where suitable structures are available to support its webs. It's rarely found indoors though, probably because most houses are too dry - those that do venture inside are unlikely to survive for long.

This is one spider that is readily recognizable from photographs. This means that you can help to put it on the map by submitting your records - visit the Spider Recording Scheme website at: [britishspiders.org.uk/srs\\_surveys](http://britishspiders.org.uk/srs_surveys)



Based on Spider Recording Scheme data 2015

Garden spiders in Britain

## For more information

[britishspiders.org.uk/srs\\_garden\\_spider](http://britishspiders.org.uk/srs_garden_spider)

Bee, L., Oxford, G. & Smith, H. (2017) *Britain's Spiders*. Princeton WILDGuides

*Charlotte's Web*, the classic children's novel by E.B. White, about a very similar American spider species, is a great introduction to the lives of these orb weavers.

## The British Arachnological Society

The BAS is Britain's only charity devoted exclusively to spiders and their relatives. We use science and education to advance the wider understanding and appreciation of arachnids, and to promote their conservation.

Find us at [www.britishspiders.org.uk](http://www.britishspiders.org.uk), [www.facebook.com/BritishSpiders](https://www.facebook.com/BritishSpiders) or on Twitter @BritishSpiders.



Female Garden spider

The Garden spider is probably our most familiar, common spider found outdoors. They are most noticeable in autumn when full grown adult females are obvious in the centre of their bicycle-wheel-shaped orb webs. The webs are iconic structures, and are what most people think of as a typical spider's web.



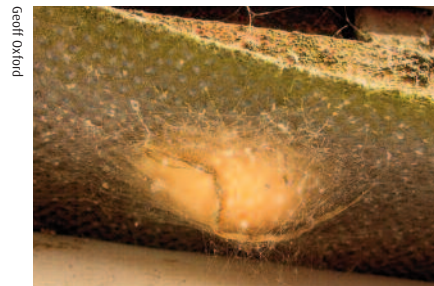
## Identification

Although the shape of the Garden spider's abdomen is usually quite distinctive the 'shoulders' are less obvious when it has just eaten. These rounder individuals could be confused with the Four-spot Orb-weaver *Araneus quadratus*, but that species is unlikely to be found in gardens and has an abdomen with four large, white spots. Two very common species, *Metellina segmentata* and *Metellina mengei*, can also look like the Garden spider but they are a lot smaller and their webs have a hole in the centre - the centre of a Garden spider's web is criss-crossed with silk. Adult male garden spiders look like females but are very much smaller. Without their enlarged pedipalps ('boxing gloves' - see *Essential spider info. Factsheet 1*) they could be mistaken for juveniles.

## Life history

The tiny, yellow young have a black tapering mark on the abdomen, quite unlike the colouration of larger juveniles and adults. They emerge from their egg sac in May and initially cluster together as a tight, golden ball in a tangle of silk. Any disturbance causes the ball to 'explode' as the spiderlings temporarily scatter. After about a week they begin to disperse, build their own miniature webs and start to feed. They usually moult two or three times before overwintering as half-grown juveniles. Growth resumes the following spring and the spiders reach maturity later that year. In the south of Britain, however, they can reach adulthood in their first year.

Males mature in August or September and females a couple of weeks later. Mature males don't make webs but seek out adult females, recognising chemical signals they leave on their silk. When a male finds a female's web he



Female Daddy-longlegs spider with egg sac

Inset: emerging young

## FACT FILE

Garden spider,  
Cross spider or  
Diadem spider  
(*Araneus diadematus*)

**Body length:** males, 4–8 mm;  
females, 10–18 mm.

### Appearance:

- Cephalothorax (front section of body) – colouration very variable, see abdomen below
- Abdomen (back section) – a distinctive shape with 'shoulders' making the body much wider at the front. The background colour can range from pale straw to dark

brown or even reddish with a darker central pattern tapering backwards. In the middle of the dark patch are white markings that can look like a cross

- Legs – brown, banded with darker brown and with many short (very visible) spines.

**Habitat:** gardens, hedges, fences, scrub, woodland edge and understory, heathland.

Daddy-longlegs spiders, and the rest were unidentifiable spider remains. Other prey includes woodlice and a wide variety of flying insects. Daddy-longlegs spiders have even been recorded eating the much sturdier and considerably heavier large house spiders (*Eratigena saeva* and *E. duellica*), and may be responsible for the decline of these species in some places. They tackle large and potentially dangerous prey items by using their very long legs to throw silk over the victim while keeping out of range. Once the prey is trussed, the Daddy-longlegs spider can move in and bite it. This species presents absolutely no danger to humans or to pets.

## Behaviour

One of the characteristics of Daddy-longlegs spiders (and also of the two other spider species with which it can be confused – see above) is that when disturbed, for example by being poked with a finger, they vibrate so rapidly in their web that they become a blur. Some orb-web weaving species (e.g. the Garden spider, *Araneus diadematus*) behave in a similar way but, whereas they shake from side to side, Daddy-longlegs spiders vibrate in a much more vigorous circular motion. This behaviour is likely to help protect the spider by confusing its predators.