

Should you kill spiders in your home?

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You probably need no convincing to kill the next spider you see in the bathtub.

Why? Because it's natural to fear spiders, and for good reason. Spiders belong outside, in nature; inside belongs to humans. We build houses for shelter and protection *from nature*. Since there is more nature in the world than there are shelters for people, we must not be guilted into saving the life of a spider.

Spiders are everywhere. A visual survey of 50 North Carolina homes revealed that 100% of them harbored arachnids. Although most of the spiders found were harmless cobweb and cellar spiders, entomologists from NC State University conceded that two medically significant species do live in the area: the black widow and the brown recluse.

Black widow neurotoxin causes severe cramps, nausea, high blood pressure and chest tightness. Although they generally live in wood piles, garages, and gutters, there is no guarantee that a wayward widow wouldn't find its way into a kitchen, or even a child's bedroom.

The brown recluse, preferring attics and basements, injects its victims with necrotoxin. What's the difference between necrotoxin and neurotoxin? In terms of damage, they're both bad. Unlike the bite of a black widow, the recluse bite can go unnoticed initially; within days, however, the victim will notice a blister, tissue damage, nausea, and fever.

Why is it natural to fear spiders? To begin with, they have an eye for a leg – eight of each! All have fangs with which to inject their venom, and all spiders are venomous. All of them. Unlike flies and bees which announce their presence by buzzing, or beetles which can be heard tiptoeing across the hardwood floor, spiders are noiseless. Silent, stealthy, and secretive, spiders slip across couch cushions and lay in wait above the shower spigot. They're always there, even when we think they're not.

Spiders are generalist predators, eating anything they can catch. They spin webs to snare irksome insects, which some tout as a reason to let them live. Leaving them alone to do their job, though, is no guarantee that they will keep disease-carrying insects, such as mosquitoes, out of a house. Killing a spider will not significantly reduce the population of other pests to benefit allowing one to live beneath your refrigerator.

So, if you truly can't stand spiders, whether inside your bedroom, living room, or bathroom, go ahead and smash them. Attempting to capture an eight-legged, eight-eyed, speedy arachnid the size of a dime is a waste of your time. Find the nearest shoe, or preferably a vacuum cleaner, and dispatch the critter ASAP.

Your mother will thank you. Your sister will cease screaming. But remember, even if you think you're living in a spider-free environment, you're wrong. Spiders are always, always there.