



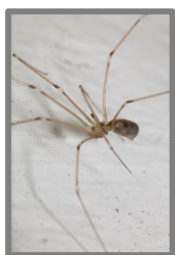
# NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

## A Story of Two Longlegs Spiders (October 19, 2024)

By Sharon Plein, Tulare/Kings Counties Master Gardener

The mere mention of the word spider causes many people to recoil in fear. This reaction even has a name (along with a movie!): arachnophobia. A few bad actors, like black widows or brown recluse spiders, give all the other members of the family a bad name. Spiders, however, have an important place in the food web and our ecosystem. They eat harmful aphids, white flies, and other insects that infest our ornamental and vegetable plantings. Some can even scare more harmful insects away. They, in turn, are tasty snacks for birds, lizards, and other animals.

There are many types of spiders in Central California, but two distinctive longlegs spider types are found in our homes and gardens. They are both called Daddy Long Legs, but they differ in genus, habitat, and, if you look hard enough, appearance.



The most common home invader of the Daddy-Longlegs types is a true arachnid that is commonly known as a Cellar Spider. These spiders have the requisite eight legs, eight eyes, and two distinct body parts. They are web spinners that prefer to live indoors or outdoors under porches, eaves, corners, and baseboards. Their messy webs are an unsightly embarrassment in any home. They hang around in suspended webs that vibrate when disturbed. They have fangs that are too small to penetrate human skin, but good luck to any soft-bodied insect that wanders by! They are not harmful to humans--that is, unless you are offended by their hanging webs, their relatives, and the remains of their recent meals.

The other longlegs insects are called Harvestmen. These are not true spiders but belong to the genus *Opiliones*. Harvestmen have eight spindly legs, two eyes, and a rounded body without sections. They live outdoors. You will notice them in the fall. In fact, that is how they got their name. They tend to congregate in groups for protection. They eat other insects and vegetation, but they do not have silk glands or cause harm to humans. Best of all, they don't build messy webs on porches, under eaves, or in the corners of your home.



The Cellar Spider/ Daddy Long Legs are a particular nuisance outside the home because they hang out on porches, around windows, corners, doors, and under any protected covering. If your home's exterior is haunted by messy webs, the first thing you should do is replace the bulbs in exterior light fixtures with yellow bulbs. The insects that the spiders feed on are attracted by bright light.

The next thing you can do is to get a soft, bristled, round-headed brush with an adjustable handle. They are appropriately named "Websters" and are available at any hardware store. These brushes are soft enough to remove webs but do not damage painted surfaces. You will have to chase the spiders around your porch to prevent them from climbing back up to build more webs and be a vigilant spider sweeper. These Daddy-longlegs are very persistent. You also want to thoroughly rinse the brush after each use because you do not want to invite the spiders that got away by hiding in the brush to take up residence inside your home or garage.

If you still have a problem with messy webs, you can mix a repellent spray using essential oils to deter the spiders from setting up housekeeping. It is a bad idea to use toxic sprays to try to eliminate Daddy Long Legs. Toxic sprays are not very effective on many spiders, and they poison beneficial insects. An essential oil spray is a spider deterrent, not a chemical insecticide. Spiders dislike strong scents like the essential oils of lavender, mint, lemon, eucalyptus, and many others. Who knew that spiders even had olfactory senses? There are many spider deterrent recipes available on the internet. Here is one DIY spray: Measure two drops of dishwashing liquid and 5 to 10 drops of peppermint essential oil into a 16-ounce spray bottle. Fill the spray bottle with water and shake to mix the ingredients. Spray the essential oil mix around problem areas. Since essential oil sprays are not insecticides, you will have to repeatedly use the spray to persuade Daddy Long Legs to set up housekeeping and move to somebody else's home.

Physically removing the spiders, reducing bright light sources at night, and using repellent sprays should eliminate the unsightly webs around your home. You can be proud to hang out your Welcome sign knowing that the Daddy Long Legs will get the message that they are not the Halloween trick-or-treater visitors who are welcome.

Happy Gardening!

**The Tulare-Kings Counties Master Gardeners will answer your questions in person:**

Visalia Farmer's Market, 1st & 3rd Saturdays, 8 - 11 am, Tulare Co. Courthouse

Oct. 19, 10 am – 1 pm: Hofman's Nursery, 12491 W Lacey Blvd., Hanford

**Questions? Call the Master Gardeners:**

Tulare County: (559) 684-3325, Tues & Thurs, 9:30-11:30;

Kings County: (559) 852-2736, Thursday Only, 9:30–11:30 am

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