

## Wittwer Studies The Black Widow

With the warm summer season here, residents of rural Nevada areas are warned to be on the lookout for the poisonous black widow spider.

Although not seldom fatal, the bite of the black widow is extremely painful. Numerous cases have been reported throughout the west, particularly in recent years when warm winters were experienced.

The black widow derives its name from its habit of dining upon its mate, the smaller male of the species which is technically known as the *Latrodectus Mactans*.

Material gathered by J. H. Wittwer, Clark County agent for the University of Nevada Agricultural Extension Service, shows that the black widows are abundant mainly in the late summer and early fall.

The insect seldom enters houses, but it frequents out-sheds, wood-piles, manholes, culvers and similar places, and is also found under rocks, in hollow logs and in burrows of animals.

It feeds normally on insects and other small creatures. Scientists declare that the black widow is not aggressive and have found it difficult to make the spider bite for experimental purposes.

The black widow is easy to recognize because the upper surface of the body is entirely black and shiny. On its under side, the spider usually has one or more red spots near the tip of the abdomen and a red mark shaped like an hourglass. Full-grown female specimens may measure one-half inch in length from head to tip of abdomen, with a much longer reach of the legs and feet. The males are much smaller.

United States Department of Agriculture experts say that complete elimination of the insect is out of the question because of its wide distribution.

But, as the first step in control, they suggest complete removal, from around dwellings and places of work, of materials which harbor the spiders. For killing the black widow in its favorite breeding places, they recommend spraying with undiluted creosote oil.

"Garages, woodsheds and outdoor toilets should be so treated," the department suggests.

"The material kills any spiders which it strikes and has a repellent effect upon others. Creosote oil destroys vegetation and damages paint and is irritating to the human skin, so it should be used with care. It is best applied with a bucket pump or compressed-air sprayer.

"One who is familiar with the appearance of the black widow and its rough web may clear out most of the spiders simply by crushing them and their eggs, which often contain 400 growing spiders."

Persons who are exposed to the spiders are warned to wear leather gloves because the black widow is liable to become pugnacious when disturbed, particularly while tending its egg-sac in the web. A bite by a black widow usually causes a stinging sensation at the point of attack, which is marked by a tiny red spot. Soon after, varying from a few minutes to an hour or more, a sharp pain develops in the region of the bite and there may be some swelling.

