



Friends of NCTC Program Activity  
*c. 2022 Friends of National Conservation Training Center*

## **Creepy Crawlies** (ages 5 and older)

### **Background**

Spiders have a bad reputation because they scare people (8 legs are creepy!) but most will not harm you. Neither will most bugs, roly polies, and worms. As cooler weather appears, spiders are coming inside to find a warm place to overwinter. If you leave them alone, you most likely won't see them at all! Of course Black Widow Spiders also like to come inside, but they prefer dark areas that are quiet, like places that aren't disturbed (behind the TV, outside sheds, etc), so be careful when poking around in those places.

The Spotted Lanternfly is a recently arrived, very destructive pest. Although this program activity prefers to encourage living in harmony with insects and spiders, it is recommended that you kill any Spotted Lanternflies without another thought. They are a threat to agricultural crops like grapes and stone fruits, ornamental yard plants like rose, maple, and river birch.

### **What You Will Need for This Project (materials and supplies)**

Magnifying glass  
Gloves (optional, but recommended for moving logs)  
Halloween costume items like black tights or pants, black shirt, black cap) (optional)  
Spray bottle for water  
Spray on spider web (optional)  
A dirt habitat, fallen log

### **What to Do**

**Look for signs of insects outside.** As cooler weather progresses, you can look in your backyard for signs of insects. Chewed leaves on bushes and trees, especially milkweed and spicebush, will be evidence of caterpillars. Tunnels under dead tree bark or on logs are the "bug trails" of bark beetles. They attack dying trees, taking advantage of a tree in distress. Anthills can be found in many places and watching these industrious little creatures can be absorbing. Watch them as they leave the hill and see where they go!

**Explore a habitat!** In the dirt, look for worms, beetles, roly polies (pillbugs). You can also scoop up leaf litter and sift through it looking for movement. Pillbugs are decomposers and are food source for birds, toads, spiders, wasps, and centipedes.

You can also find a decomposing tree or stump and discover what lives there. To find out, put on some gloves and carefully turn the log toward you. (That lets anything under it, that you don't want to encounter, has a safe exit. It's always a good idea to look around the log first to make sure a snake is not resting near or under it as they can get annoyed when disturbed!) When you turn it, look for movement. What scurries away? A salamander may scoot quickly, but roly polies won't get far before you can watch them.

**One Leg or Two?** Millipedes and centipedes are fascinating to watch and compare. You can use a magnifying glass to look at them closely. Millipedes can be found in moist forest areas and leaf litter, while centipedes prefer dry environments. Neither sees well so you will be a giant to them. Try and find examples of both species and take a closer look.

Millipedes have two legs per body part underneath their more rounded body. They are scavengers, eating mostly decomposing plants so although they may look scary, they won't hurt you. They usually roll up when they feel threatened. Some millipedes have up to 750 legs! (You can try counting them if the critter will stay still!)

Centipedes have one leg per body part on the side of their flatter body. They are carnivores that kill insects and eat them. Centipedes can have up to 350. That's a lot of legwork! Centipedes can bite humans, but the bite is generally harmless, and they run away quickly. You can often find centipedes in your basement.

Do you notice the differences? What about the similarities? If you were to study these creatures, would you prefer to be "on the scene" out in nature or in the lab?

**Spiders!** Spiders have a bad reputation because many people are scared of them (8 legs are creepy!) but most will not harm you. Spiders are pretty common during the fall because they have finally grown large enough to be seen (they start out really small!) Spiders tend to mate during the fall months and they are out and about looking for a likely partner. Nearly all house spiders are harmless and they eat insect pests like mosquitoes.

Have you ever walked into a spider web? It's not much fun, but webs are amazing creations. Spiders are incredible engineers and can repair a broken spiderweb fairly quickly.

**By highlighting a spider web you can see its beauty.** Using a spray bottle filled with water, spray the web lightly to highlight the strands. It will be much easier to see. (You can wait and find one covered with dew on a tree or outside your door in the early morning.) Take a picture of the wet web and send to the Friends of NCTC Kid's Page!

<http://friendsofnctc.org/kids>

**Halloween is Coming!** Maybe you have thought about dressing up for Halloween as Spiderman, but why not be a spider instead!? You don't need to buy a costume because you can make your own! Just make sure your costume has 8 legs (remember: your own count as two of them!)

<http://www.blissbloomblog.com/2011/10/make-cute-spider-costume.html?m=1>



**Wooly Worms.** Some people say the black and brown, fuzzy caterpillars you see in many places at this time of year can forecast the winter weather! Do you believe that?

Here's what to look for: Weather folklore says if the brown part is wide, then the winter will be mild; the more black there is on the caterpillar, the colder and snowier it will be. Sometimes you will see an almost all black or all brown wooly worm; these are just variations on the common brown/black appearance.

Wooly Worms as weather predictors have been studied for almost 75 years and many people believe that they might be some indication of the folklore about winter weather. Who really knows!?! (Check the TV weather if you really want to know about tomorrow's weather!) This is actually a caterpillar that becomes the Isabella Tiger Moth. They overwinter in a cocoon, often on logs, so look for them in colder weather when you are walking in the woods. In some parts of the United States, they are called Wooly Bears. (You could dress up as a Wooly Worm for Halloween, too, but you'll need brown on your costume and LOTS more legs!)

**Be On The Lookout For The Spotted Lanternfly!!** The Spotted Lanternfly is a native of China, Taiwan, and Vietnam, so it doesn't belong here! Unfortunately, it recently arrived to the United States and it is a very destructive pest. They can destroy grapes and grapevines, stone fruits (like peaches) and common yard plants like roses and maple trees. As a younger naturalist, we want you to live in harmony with insects and spiders, but this particular insect is so destructive that state agriculture departments recommend that you should kill it without a second thought.

**Helpful Hints for Adults**  
**(books to read, other websites, links)**

*Anansi the Spider* by Gerald McDermott

*Children's Guide to Insects and Spiders* by Jinny Johnson

*Diary of a Spider* by Doreen Cronin

*Charlotte's Web* by E.B. White

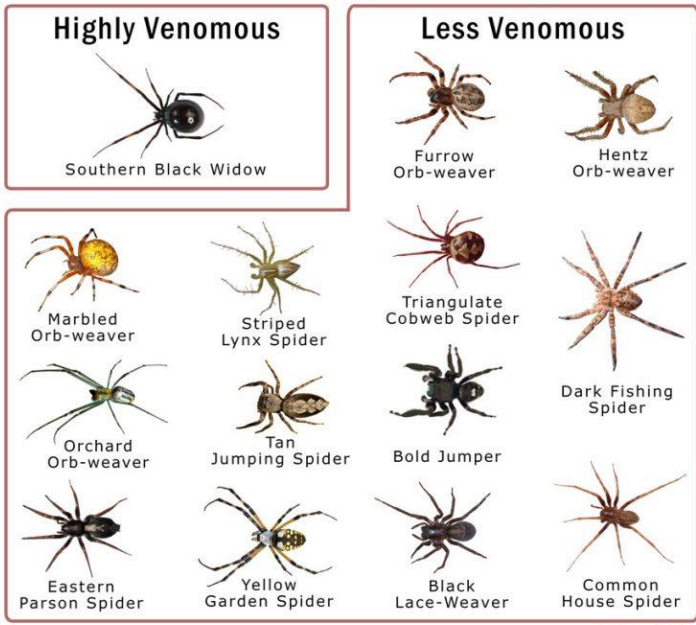
*Dr. Eleanor's Book of Common Spiders* by Christopher Buddle and Eleanor Spicer Rice

*The Private Life of Spiders* by Paul Hillyard

Spotted Lanternfly

<https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/resources/pests-diseases/hungry-pests/the-threat/spotted-lanternfly/spotted-lanternfly>

## Spiders in West Virginia



<https://spideridentifications.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Spiders-in-West-Virginia-Identification-Chart-768x768.jpg>