

## Spider Mites [August 7, 2015](#) by [wizzie.brown](#)

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Do you have webbing covering plants in your landscape? Or maybe, you have webbing covering some of the leaves on your plants? Check the underside of the leaves for spider mites.

Spider mites are not insects, but arachnids more closely related to spiders. They are very small, often looking like little dots running around on the leaf surface. If you look with a hand lens, you'll see that adults have eight legs and oval shaped bodies. Immatures resemble adults (except for the first stage out of the egg which only has six legs), but will be smaller in size.



Spider mites thrive and reproduce rapidly in hot weather, so conditions have been great for them lately. A generation can be completed within a week when conditions are favorable. Plants under water stress can become infested with spider mites.

Spider mites cause leaves to get a speckled appearance, called stippling, where the mites suck juices from the plant. Leaves may also turn a yellow or bronze color and eventually drop off. Leaves and other parts of the plant may also become covered with webbing.

So, what to do about spider mites?

- First off, check that you have an active infestation. Many times people see spider mite damage, but the mites are long gone.
- Ask yourself if you need to do anything or are beneficials doing the job for you.
- Avoid spider mites by reducing stress to your plants with planting in the proper location, watering and fertilizing properly.
- Try knocking spider mites off the plant using high pressure water spray.
- Be aware that sometimes pesticides may cause spider mites to become more of a problem after they are used.
- If you choose to use a pesticide, treat the underside of the leaves where spider mites like to hang out.





# Spider Mite

*Twospotted spider mite, Tetranychus urticae* Koch  
(Acari: Tetranychidae). Photo by Drees.

**Common Name:** Spider mite

**Scientific Name:** *Tetranychus urticae* Koch

**Order:** Acari

**Description:** Adult mites are small, 1/32 inch (0.4 mm) or less. Body is globular, yellowish to greenish and is often marked with darker spots on the back. The body has eight legs. The mites spin protective webs of silk over infested plant surfaces.

There are many other spider mites common in Texas, the **southern red mite**, *Oligonychus ilicis* (McGregor) is similar to the twospotted spider mite. Another important plant feeding mite group is the **false spider mites** (Tenuipalpidae).

**Life Cycle:** Outdoors, twospotted spider mites may overwinter as adults or continue to breed on host plants in mild winters or indoors. Adults lay clear to yellowish spherical eggs, often suspended in a fine web of silk on the undersides of host plant leaves. Spotless, clear greenish to brownish six legged nymphal stages hatch from eggs and develop into 8 legged nymphs as they molt two more times. Adult male and female mites mate soon after emerging from the last nymphal stage. Generation from egg to adult occurs in 5 to 20 days, depending upon temperature. Many generations can occur per year. When heavily infested host plants decline, the mites spin silk threads and use these strands to passively “fly” or “balloon” in wind to disperse.

**Habitat, Food Source(s), Damage:** Mouthparts (chelicerae) appear as tiny microscopic toothpick-like structures with which they can pierce plant cells. Mites pierce clusters of surface (epidermal) cells and use their other mouthparts (palpi) to suck out the contents (mesophyll). Damaged clusters of cells appear as yellow (chlorotic) yellow and later, bronzy (necrotic) stipples on the leaves. On light to moderately infested leaves, stipples are concentrated around the leaf’s midrib and larger veins. Leaves on more heavily injured plants can become yellowed, bronze and fall off.

Pests of many (over 180) agronomic and horticultural crops including soybeans, cotton, small grains, vegetables and ornamental plants. They also thrive on some weed species (chickweed, pokeweed, wild mustard) and blackberries. All stages occur primarily on the undersides of leaves.

**Pest Status:** Plant feeder, causes stippling or bronzing of leaves.

Literature: Carter *et al.* 1982; Drees 1994