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## Cobweb Weaver Spiders *(Family Theridiidae)*

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### **Beneficial Basement Dwellers!**

Also known as the tangle-web weavers, cobweb spiders, or comb footed spiders, the cobweb weavers are a large, diverse, and familiar family of true spiders consisting of over 100 genera, and over 2,200 species found in most areas worldwide from temperate, arid, to tropical and sub-tropical regions. Members of this family of spiders can be extremely diverse in their size, shape, colors, and patterns, and also include some of the well-known medically significant species such as the widows. Most species, however, can be identified by their pea sized and shaped, or bulbous abdomens. The vast majority of these species, however are harmless and not medically significant to humans, feeding on many other harmful or nuisance household pests, and can often be found in dark, somewhat cool and damp areas in and around homes and residential areas. These spiders also typically construct a variety of three dimensional webs for navigational purposes, as well as for capturing prey, reproduction and courtship, and other purposes depending on the species and their lifestyles. Members of this family of spiders are also commonly used in as model organisms in many forms of research. These spiders can make for simple and hardy specimens to maintain in captivity.

### **Taxonomy**

**Life:** All living, physical, and animate entities

**Domain:** Eukaryota

**Kingdom:** Animalia

**Phylum:** Arthropoda

**Subphylum:** Chelicerata

**Class:** Arachnida

**Order:** Araneae

**Infraorder:** Araneomorphae

**Family:** Theridiidae

*\*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

### **Lifespan and Longevity**

Longevity of most species of true spiders can be variable depending on the species, sex, and reproductive status, with females typically attaining slightly longer longevity than males. Cobweb weaver spiders may live for as few as only a few months to a little over a year or two. Females of some species can live for up to 5 years.

### **Distribution and Habitat**

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Depending upon the exact species, cobweb weaver spiders can be found in a variety of habitats throughout most of the world. They may be found in temperate to tropical or sub-tropical forests, semi arid deserts and scrublands, intertidal zones, mountaine regions, and even urban and suburban, or agricultural areas in and around homes, gardens, and farmsteads.

### **Conservation Status**

Conservation status dependent upon the species. Some species are IUCN Least Concern (LC). Some are IUCN Near Threatened (NT), Conservation Dependent (CD), Vulnerable (VU), Endangered (EN), to Critically Endangered (CE). Some Not Evaluated for the IUCN Red List (NE) or otherwise Data Deficient (DD).

### **Legal and Regulatory Status (\*Subject to Change)**

Consult with your local, municipal, and state ordinances and regulations for any ownership restrictions.

### **Experience Level Required**

Novice/Beginner to Advanced depending on the species.

### **Size**

Most cobweb weavers are relatively small to mid-sized true spiders, which can vary in size depending on the species, sex, and reproductive status. They may range from 0.04 to 1 ½ inches in size.

### **Housing and Enclosure**

Cobweb weaver spiders are quite simple and hardy to house and provide enclosures for. These spiders can be housed in an appropriately sized spiderling vial, plastic container or deli cup with adequate holes for ventilation. Several of the acrylic displays and enclosures that are now manufactured for housing arachnids, insects, and other invertebrates can also be used. Acceptable substrate to use can include pesticide free potting soil, coconut fiber, vermiculite, or similar substrates 3 to 4 inches in depth. Decorations and/or other cage furnishings can also be included as well, although floor space is more important than height. These spiders will also benefit from branches, horizontal cork bark, and plants for refuge. A fairly small, shallow water dish can also be provided, and should be cleaned regularly as well as regular misting for hydration, but care should be taken to not over-mist.

### **Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity**

Most species of cobweb spiders have simple and undemanding heating and lighting requirements in captivity, and do not require additional UVA/UVB lighting, although providing it can be greatly beneficial for your spider's health, immune system, and overall wellness. Most cobweb spiders are hardy species that do best at room temperature between 70 to 80 degrees. Maintain at 60 to 70% humidity. For any supplemental heating that may be needed, use a low wattage incandescent or UVA/UVB bulb, radiant or ceramic heat emitter, or UTH (under tank heating element). Do not keep them at temperature extremes however. More specific lighting, heating, and humidity product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well.

### **Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition**

*Insectivorous to Carnivorous;* In the wild, cobweb spiders are primarily insectivorous, meaning they eat insects and other invertebrates. In captivity, these spiders can be fed a variety of appropriately sized feeder insects such as crickets, roaches, moths, fruit flies, other flies, and

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other small feeder insect items. Feeder insects should be gut-loaded in order to increase their optimal nutritional value. This will promote optimal exoskeleton growth and development. Any uneaten food items should be cleaned and removed after a day or two. Their feeding frequency will depend on the age, size, and overall health of your animal. Use care as to not overfeed even invertebrates, as obesity and other health related issues can still become an issue with them. More specific dietary and supplementary product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well.

### **Handling**

Most cobweb spiders are small, fragile, and delicate spiders. Thus, care should be taken when handling them, and to ensure they do not drop, fall, or escape and become lost. All true spiders are also venomous, and although most may be harmless and not medically significant, the possibility of a severe allergic reaction or heightened sensitive reaction still exists. Thus, these spiders are perhaps best suited for viewing, rather than handling. A few of the medically significant species, although not normally defensive or prone to bite unless provoked, such as widows, should obviously not be free-handled.

\*\*Also be sure to practice basic cleanliness and hygiene associated with proper husbandry after touching or handling any animals or animal enclosures to prevent the possibility of contracting salmonellosis or any other zoonotic pathogens\*\*

### **Contact**

Authored by Eric Roscoe. For any additional questions, comments, and/or concerns regarding this animal, group of animals, or this care sheet, please email and contact the Madison Area Herpetological Society at [info@madisonherps.org](mailto:info@madisonherps.org)

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