

Beneficial Species Profile



Photo credit: Josh Shoemaker (left), Gerald S. Wegner (right)

Common Name: Spinybacked orbweaver (also spiny orbweaver and spinybacked spider)

Scientific Name: *Gasteracantha cancriformis*

Order and Family: Araneae: Araneidae

Size and Appearance:

These spiders have a crablike appearance. Various color patterns exist including white with black spines, white with red spines, and yellow with black spines. The spines of specimens found in the west are typically smaller than those found in the eastern US (see above left versus right).

	Length (mm)	Appearance
Egg		Usually on undersides of leaves near the web, the egg sacs are flattened and oval shaped; they are white, yellow, or green and have a dark green stripe.
Larva/Nymph	Smaller than adults	Immatures look like small adults.
Adult	Total body length (not including legs) F: 5.8 – 8.6 mm M: 1.9 – 2.7 mm	Females can be up to 13 mm wide. The hard-shelled abdomen of the female has 6 pointed projections around the edge. Males are much smaller and the 6 projections are more humplike.
Pupa (if applicable)		N/A

Type of feeder (Chewing, sucking, etc.): Spiders digest their prey outside the body. This is done by regurgitating digestive fluid into the prey. The dissolved tissue of the prey is then sucked up through the mouth.

Host/s:

This spider feeds on insects that become trapped in its web. Spiders in the family Araneidae have relatively poor vision and use vibration to sense their prey. Spinybacked orbweavers construct a new web every night.

Description of Benefits:

This spider is found in more southern areas of the US. Its webs are usually found around lower tree branches and in between shrubs. Webs are sometimes at an angle. The spider generally sits in the middle of the web, facing down, during the day. They feed on many different insects, including beetles, moths, and small flies. They are found in citrus groves where they aid in biological control.

References:

Bradley, R. A., & Buchanan, S. (2019). *Common spiders of North America*. University of California Press.

Evans, A. V. (2008). *Field guide to insects and spiders & related species of North America*. Sterling.

Foelix, R. F. (1996). *Biology of spiders* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.

Peters, A. (2002). *Gasteracantha cancriformis*. Animal Diversity Web.

https://animaldiversity.org/site/accounts/information/Gasteracantha_cancriformis.html.

Triplehorn, C. A., & Johnson, N. F. (2005). *Borror and DeLong's introduction to the study of insects* (7th ed.). Brooks/Cole.