

What's that plinking noise in the garden

Summer is a quiet time in my garden. When I stop to listen - and it is best to do this late at night or very early in the morning when lawn mowers, blowers and cars are sleeping - I hear little plinking noises. I think that it is spider poops falling from webs. The evidence is the abundance of spiders and the little poppy seed-like balls caught in webs, on leaves and on the ground.

Little seed-like pellets, are they spider poops?



About two weeks ago grass or funnel-web spiders were the predominant spiders in my garden. They make messy webs all over the trees and shrubs.

Cob-webs are everywhere, including this branch of the coast live oak.



A closer look reveals a tiny spider among the messy web. Jiggling the web causes the spider to quickly retreat to the funnel at the edge of the web.

Here's one of the tiny funnel-web spiders. So small - and a challenge to photograph.



Now, in late July, it is orb weaving spiders that ornament the garden, and a prettier look it is.

Close-up of an orbit-weaving spider. I think the black smudge is dinner because it was gone later.



Instead of massive cobwebs covering the trees and shrubs, delicate circular webs hang in mid-air, catching the wind and the light, and for the spiders, a tasty meal or two.

Orb-weaver repairs her web.

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My kids, all three arachnophobic, hate these the most. The kids run - arms waving, along the poorly lit paths, through webs that hang in mid-air - hoping to arrive safely with no unwelcome critters crawling on them. Well I am here to inform them that these spiders are of low risk to humans, and I quote from [PEST ID](#):

Venom toxicity - the bite of Orb-Weaving Spiders is of low risk (not toxic) to humans. They are a non-aggressive group of spiders. Seldom bite. **Be careful not to walk into their webs**

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at night - the fright of this spider crawling over one's face can be terrifying and may cause a heart attack, particularly to the susceptible over 40 year olds.

(So, kids, since none of you is over 40, there is nothing to worry about. Lizzie, you are still coming home, right?)

Lovely as these spiders are, they may seem kind of boring, that is, if you find the specter of a struggle for life and death boring. Occasionally this very drama is played out before my eyes. A few months ago, on my way to run some inane errand I was stopped by vigorous swinging in a web near the garage. For about ten minutes I was transfixed as a long-legged spider carefully wrapped her living prey into a neat, tidy package.

The webby-container keeps this spider's food fresh and nourishing, much better than plastic wrap!



This beautiful lynx spider worked hard to secure her meal, a honey bee. As I recall, the bee got away, but I think it just fell, lifelessly, out of the web. Such a waste.



National Geographic has an amazing clip of a [jumping spider killing a bee](#).

In addition to bringing excitement and drama into the garden, and definitely more important, spiders keep insects under control with no need for chemical insecticides. A garden with no spiders is either a barren wasteland, or it is over run with insect pests.

So like I said, my garden is a quiet place in the summer. Mostly I just sit and enjoy, but there is always something to do in a garden. In addition to the tasks mentioned in the [last post](#), I also hosed off some plants a few days ago. The garden was looking kind of grimy from cobwebs and dust. I hope I didn't hurt too many spiders, or waste too much water. In fact, I hope that an occasional hosing off, about once a summer, is good for the plants since it cleans their leaves so they are better able to photosynthesize and transpire. The whole garden looks a bit cleaner and sharper.