



# HARVESTMEN (Daddy Longlegs)

In many backyards the most conspicuous "spider" isn't a spider at all, but rather something related to the spiders, as are scorpions, ticks, mites, centipedes and millipedes. This is the Daddy-longlegs, also known as the Harvestman. A Brown Harvestman, is shown at the right.

## HARVESTMEN AREN'T SPIDERS

If you look at the body of a Daddy-longlegs with your magnifying glass, you'll see why it's not a spider. First of all, instead of its body consisting of two parts, the cephalothorax and the abdomen, as with spiders, there's just one thing. A Daddy Longlegs has its head, thorax, and abdomen all fused together. Second, instead of the spider's usual eight eyes, a Daddy Longlegs just possesses two.

## HARVESTMEN ARE HARMLESS

You don't need to be afraid of Daddy Longlegs because they have no venom at all. I know that many people say "Though they have mouthparts so small they can't bite, they have the most poisonous of all venoms in the animal kingdom." This is just one of those "urban myths" going around.

## HARVESTMEN ARE LEGGY CREATURES

The most disconcerting thing that can happen with a Daddy Longlegs is that if you try to handle one, one or more of its legs might fall off. This may be an adaptation to help the critter escape its predators. Unfortunately, the loss of legs can be fairly serious to a Daddy Longlegs because its legs are important sensory organs. One student of harvestman life once wrote, "A study of harvestmen is a study of legs." That's because the legs, especially the second pair, serve as ears, nose, tongue, and perhaps even as supplementary "eyes." The legs are loaded with nerves and literally thousands of tiny sense organs that lie inside microscopic slits in the legs.

## HARVESTMEN ECOLOGY

Average Daddy Longlegs eat a wide variety of foods, including: aphids, caterpillars, beetles, flies, mites, small slugs, snails, earthworms, spiders, other harvestmen, decaying plant and animal matter, bird droppings and fungi. One in a terrarium will survive on tidbits of bread, butter and fatty meat as well. If you watch one eat, notice how after each meal it draws its legs one at a time through its jaws, cleaning them. Birds are among its enemies. Daddy Longlegs release a stinking odor as a defense against predators.

Every ten days or so the average Daddy Longlegs *molts*. It splits open its body case, skeleton, then takes about 20 minutes to drag its long legs from their old casings.

Once you watch Daddy-longlegs long enough, you might notice that there's a smaller-bodied, long-legged form, and a larger-bodied, shorter-legged one. The small-bodied, long-legged one is the male

## Daddy Long-Legs Spider Q&A

### Are Daddy Longlegs Spiders?



Surprisingly, daddy longlegs, also called harvestman (also spelled harvestmen – with an “e”) and sometimes grand daddy longlegs, are not spiders. Although they resemble spiders with their eight legs and oval bodies and are often confused for [cellar spiders](#), they are missing two key components of spiders: venom and silk. Spiders catch their prey in webs and inject them with some type of venom. Daddy longlegs do not spin webs nor have venom to kill their victims and are part of a group of insects called opiliones. Their bodies are about 1/16 to 1/2 of an inch long with very

long legs. So the next time someone asks you if a Daddy Long Leg is a spider or not, you can say “No!”

### Are Daddy Long legs Poisonous?

There is a myth that states that daddy longlegs are the most toxic of all spiders, but their mouths are too small to inflict any damage to humans. This myth is false! They are not spiders and do not have venom so they are not poisonous. They have mouths similar to crabs or scorpions that allow them to catch and hold their prey in their jaws but cannot harm humans. They are mostly scavengers and will often feed on dead insects or decaying organic matter, but also eat garden pests like aphids.

### Daddy Longlegs Habitat

Daddy Longlegs do not like indoor environments unless they are damp, like cellars, unfinished basements, sheds, etc. You will rarely find them indoors in living spaces. Daddy longlegs are often seen in large numbers in the winter, congregating near trees and eaves and windows of homes, but this behaviour does not last long. They lay eggs in soil, under rocks, or in cracks of wood or bark, and these eggs hatch in spring.



### How to Get Rid of Daddy Long Legs

Daddy longlegs are mostly a nuisance in the fall with their clustering behavior. You can easily get these critters off your home with a broom or vacuum, but sometimes they are unpleasant or in extremely large numbers. You can choose to treat your home's exterior with a product formulated for this insect. Or although not necessary get Exopest do a full spider spray in which case some will be eliminated in that process