Spiders have a role in active gardens
By: Dawn Hart

Tired from my busy day, I love to sit on my glider in the back yard, and just enjoy the evening. Not too long ago I noticed a very busy spider, so I started to watch as the web was spun, and she began to gather her meal. There is truly something magical about these webs. One day there is a clean garden and the next day the garden can be covered with spider webs.

As my curiosity began to evolve, I decided to find out some facts about spiders and their webs. I learned so many interesting things. Did you know that not too many years ago, spider webs were a part of first aid kits? Since spider webs are made of protein, many folks used them, like we now use Band-Aids.

Spider webs are not only amazing feats of engineering, but also things of beauty when you take the time to really look at them. I found out that some spiders can spin as many as five different types of silk for various purposes, and that spider silk is the strongest natural fiber known to man.

Because spiders have oil on their bodies they don’t get caught in their own webs, and they also have special hooked claws that grab the silk threads so they can readily traverse the web. I found out, that spiders in the garden show us the following three wildlife-friendly characteristics in the way we garden, and are the basic differences between wild life friendly and traditional gardening.

**You are not doing a “too thorough” cleaning in your garden.**
**The garden is providing food and shelter that spiders need.**

The garden that attracts spiders will attract the bug-eating birds such as humming birds, wrens and finches. During the winter months wrens eat dormant spiders from the bark on trees, the ground, and accumulating plant litter with flowering shrubs in my back yard, I have plenty of that). This is a good place to remind you that you don’t want to allow garden
litter to get too thick, as it then becomes a haven for unwanted critters like black widows, recluse spiders and scorpions.

When you see wrens sitting on an old birdhouse or on top of a wall, you know their favorite food is not too far away. Soon they will start searching in the shrubs and mulch beneath, then suddenly she flits away to feed her babies back in the nest.

Soon I see her watching a jumping spider on the wall. When a jumping spider sees an insect flying by, it will jump to catch the bug on the wing, all the while spinning a silk thread to bring herself back to her web.

Did you know that hummingbirds not only eat spiders, they also line their nests with the web silk, giving the nests strength and expandability as the babies grow?

Once I noticed a wasp sitting on a flower blossom. As she was feeding on the flower nectar, I remembered that a wasp can paralyze spiders and then feed them to her young.

I realize that everything comes full circle. Plants feed bugs, bugs are food for birds and birds beautify my garden. There is a little world of its own in my garden.

Dawn Hart is a Lake Havasu Master Gardener. For details, contact the Lake Havasu Master Gardeners at the Hotline, 505-4105 or visit us at Home Garden Day from 11am to 1pm the first Tuesday of every month at the Library.

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