

## Tarantula



There are more than 800 different species of tarantula. With a record-breaking leg span of 28 centimetres, the Goliath bird-eating tarantula of South America is one of the largest. Mexican red-legged and Chilean rose tarantulas are popular as pets, and the Indian oriental spider is the largest tree-dwelling spider in the world.

The name tarantula originally described wolf spiders found across southern Europe. In the Italian city of Taranto, people were afraid that a bite from a large spider would kill them. They believed that the only way to get rid of the poison was to dance the tarantella dance. Today the name tarantula is more likely to describe large, hairy spiders found in many countries including Mexico, Chile and Sri Lanka. Only some of these are venomous.

Most tarantulas aren't dangerous to humans, but they can give you a painful bite. Some shed hairs from their bodies and flick them into the face of creatures that pose a threat. The tiny hairs are incredibly itchy and some people are allergic to them.

A tarantula has a round hairy body, eight legs and eight eyes. Its sight is poor so it uses the hairs on its body to sense vibrations. Like other spiders, the tarantula produces silk from spinnerets at the back of its body. But this spider doesn't often build webs. Instead it uses the silk to line its burrow.



Tarantulas hide in burrows or crevices until nightfall and ambush passing insects. They also eat other spiders and small lizards. They rear up to attack their prey, striking downwards and injecting venom through large fangs. The paralysed victim is grabbed with two arms (called palps) at the front of the spider's body. The unfortunate animal is squirted with digestive juice to turn its insides to liquid. The spider then sucks out the insides of its prey. Yuk!

