



The Araneide Inside

By Mitchell Scott

A not-so-real rendition of an Orb Weaver spider. Does she stay? Or does she go? Photo: Alistair Fraser

The spiders are everywhere. Up in the corner of the ceiling. Down beside the baseboard. Under the coffee table. Hidden in the plant. In the fall they're the worst, loading up their bellies before winter's onset, before their prey retreat to the dark caverns from which they spawn.

I'll come down the stairs and walk through a fresh web. I'll see the corpses of sucked-dry wood bugs beneath a bookshelf. Find a cluster of spider droppings behind the dryer. Late at night, watching TV in the basement, a big wolf spider will come cruising out onto the carpet, on the hunt. Sprinting then pausing, it scurries for cover when it sees me move.

There's something about the eight-legged, eight-eyed, fang-and-web-armed creatures that irks me. I don't like how they've taken over. I can kill them, relocate them, spray creepy crawly bug-killer juice at the entrance of the back door; it still doesn't matter. They're on the inside and they won't be deterred. I've spotted the odd black widow, wolfies bigger than a tweeker, long-legged breeders that spawn as quick as they die. The kids have been tagged by bites on the lip, the wife on the arm. The vacuum has more spider debris in it than it does dust bunnies. You could say it's a war, this never-ending fight for territory between me and the arachnids.

But as the yearly battles wear on, I find myself giving up. Not only is the campaign a hassle—the bug juice on my finger after I swat one on the carpet is particularly upsetting—I'm beginning to

question my dominion over this space I call my home. It appears to me that nature isn't aware of my legal deed to 2,000 square feet. There are bugs in here, more than I care to know, and where there are bugs, there are meals. Where there are meals, there's an ecosystem.

Yet, as humans, we have this fragmented dialogue with nature when it comes to our abodes. Sure, we love the beautiful spider web when it's glistening with dew in the garden. Put that baby in the doorway to the bathroom, dim the lights, and it's a horror movie moment.

So we sweep up the dirt, we kill all the spiders, we squash all the bugs, set our ant traps, wave our electrically charged wasp zappers, all in an effort to keep nature out. Yes, it's not called the "great outdoors" for nothing.

But maybe therein lies the deep-seated problem when it comes to our relationship with the natural world. It's not invited. Not allowed to pop by for a visit. Not allowed to set up shop in a rarely used corner of the basement. You'll invite a neighbour over, even the pizza guy gets to come in. But a spider? No way.

So, I'm on a bit of a different spider program this fall. It's not a free-for-all. Not yet, but I've given the arachnid crew some liberties. The puny guys up in the corner and under the bookshelf can stay. The silver dollar-sized wolfies? Well, I'm still not totally down with those hairy monsters. Maybe next year.