Common orb weaving spiders in Virginia

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Adult female sizes (body length = cephalothorax + abdomen length)

 Large = 12 - 25 mm
 Small = 6 - 8 mm

 Medium = 8 - 12 mm
 Tiny = less than 5 mm.

The credit for each photo is identified by photo number on the last page.

All photos are of adult female spiders. When a male orb weaver becomes mature it stops spinning webs and searches for a female with whom it can mate.

Species are listed under the habitat in which they are typically found.

Species found on weedy vegetation





Argiope trifasciata - Banded garden orb weaver (large)



This species is found in overgrown fields and weeds along fence lines. Yellow and white bands extend across its abdomen, unlike the yellow markings of *Argiope aurantia*, which are found along the sides of the abdomen. The webs of this species often have a silken zig-zag decoration called a "stabilimentum" at the center. A stabilimentum is shown in figure 3.



Argiope aurantia - black and yellow garden spider (large)



While similar in color scheme to *Argiope trifasciata*, this spider can be distinguished by its rows of spots, rather than bands, which are most dense along the sides of the abdomen. It also has two notable humps at the front of its abdomen. *Argiope aurantia* builds a stabilimentum that is often very large and easy to spot. As a result, it is sometimes referred to as the "writing spider."



Species found along the forest edge



Leucauge venusta - Orchard orb weaver (small)



This spider has a uniquely marked abdomen. It is mostly silver with black and brown streaks and has a stunning black and yellow pattern on its underside, shown in figure 8. The word *venusta* refers to the beauty of the spider, since Venus is the Roman goddess of love and beauty. Leucauge *venusta* has the unfortunate trait of being the host species for a parasitic wasp. The wasp larva attaches to the connecting point between the spider's cephalothorax and abdomen. Under the influence of the larva, the spider builds a web that will support the larva's cocoon.



Cyclosa turbinata - Humped trashline orb weaver (small)



Cyclosa turbinata earns its common name "trashline spider" from the line of debris it assembles down the center of its web. Its brown and white abdomen closely resembles *Cyclosa conica*, another trashline species, but one way to tell them apart is that *Cyclosa turbinata* has a unique set of humps near the middle of its abdomen. In figure 9, the humps on the abdomen of *Cyclosa turbinata* can be seen.



For reference, two photos of *Cyclosa conica* are shown below:





Araneus marmoreus - Marbled orb weaver (large)



This spider is a very recognizable orb weaver due to its colorful body and nearly spherical abdomen. The species has a wide variety of possible colors such as bright orange, light yellow, and varying shades of brown. *Araneus marmoreus* is also known as the "Halloween spider" not only because they are commonly orange in color, but because large females are often spotted on the ground near the end of October when they are preparing to lay their eggs. During the day, these spiders sit inside a retreat made from a folded leaf (figure 15) while they wait for insects to become trapped in their web.



Metepeira labyrinthea - Labyrinth orb weaver (medium)



The labyrinth orb weaver spins a very unusual web. It is made of two main sections: the orb web, and an irregular, tangled section known as the "labyrinth." The orb web is used for catching food and the labyrinth is where the spider sits and waits (figure 17). It will weave leaves and other debris into the labyrinth to blend in with its surroundings.



Micrathena sagittata - Arrowhead micrathena (medium)



This spider's name comes from its triangular, arrowhead-like shape. It has two large points that extend from the back of the abdomen and four much smaller points. All points on the spider's body have a deep red coloration, which stand out against its stunning yellow abdomen. *Micrathena sagittata* will sometimes build a stabilimentum in its web. Unlike many orb weavers, this spider does not wrap its prey in silk before consuming it.



Neoscona arabesca - Arabesque orb weaver (small)



This species earns its name from the balletlike movements it makes while building its web. An arabesque is a ballet position in which one leg is on the floor while the other leg is extended straight out behind the dancer. Similar poses can be seen by the spider. Another recognizable trait of *Neoscona arabesca* is its two rows of black markings that run down the abdomen. Individuals can vary in color; some are tan or brown while others are orange.



Neoscona crucifera - Arboreal orb weaver (large)



This spider is a nocturnal species, leaving its web up during the day and rebuilding it every evening after the sun sets. The word *crucifera* means "cross bearing" and refers to the cross-like pattern on its abdomen. However, individuals of this species can vary significantly in their colors and don't always have a clear cross-like pattern. Some color variants are pictured.





Species found in the forest interior



Micrathena gracilis - Spined micrathena (medium)



Micrathena gracilis has a very interesting body shape, possibly meant to resemble the dry, spiky seeds known as burrs. This species has eight black spikes arranged in a ring on the top of the abdomen and two spikes at the back. Because of this spider's tendency to build webs across forest trails, they occasionally go for accidental rides on hikers who walk through their webs.



Verrucosa arenata - arrowhead spider (medium)



This species is the only one of its genus to be found in the United States. The word *verrucosa* means "warty" and describes the small humps present on the spider's abdomen. *Verrucosa arenata* hangs in its web with its head facing up, despite most orb weavers hanging with their head facing down. Individuals can vary in abdomen color from white to yellow. A male is shown at left and a female is shown below.



Mangora maculata - Green legged orb weaver (tiny)



This spider is usually light green but can sometimes be yellowish in color. It prefers to live in lowstanding vegetation of moist deciduous forests and blends in quite well among leaves. Dried leaves are where it prefers to build its egg sac.



Species found near water



Tetragnatha elongata - Large long-jawed orb weaver (large)



This spider likes to build its web horizontally above streams, which makes it very good at catching insects that live in or on the water, such as mosquitos. *Tetragnatha elongata* attaches its egg sac to branches and decorates them with greenish silk.

Tetragnatha laboriosa - Silver long-jawed orb weaver (medium)



This species is one of the smallest yet most common of its genus. It can be identified by its chelicerae that are characteristically shorter than its cephalothorax, as well as its abdomen shape that is rounder than other members of the genus. Individuals are often silver-colored but can have some yellow on their bodies as well. This spider is not usually found as close to water as other tetragnathids; they tend to build their webs in the loose vegetation of fields and forest edges.



Larinioides cornutus - furrow orb weaver (large)



The abdomen and carapace of this species often have very few setae and appear shiny in result. This spider can be found all year round and often builds its web near bodies of water, on buildings and other structures. Like *Neoscona crucifera*, this spider is nocturnal and rebuilds its web each evening.



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