

Chilean Fire Tarantula

(*Grammostola spatulata*)

Kingdom: *Animalia*
Phylum: *Arthropoda*
Class: *Arachnida*
Order: *Araneae*
Family: *Theraphosidae*



Tarantula is the common name for any of about 800 species of large, hairy spiders belonging to the family Theraphosidae. In the United States the name tarantula includes related families—such as the trapdoor, purse-web, and funnel-web spiders—in the tarantula suborder Mygalomorphae.

DESCRIPTION: The tarantula family includes the largest spiders known. The goliath tarantula, *Theraposa leblondi*, which inhabits South America, reaches a body length of 4 inches and a leg span of up to 10 inches. Even the small tarantulas reach a relatively large body length of 1.5 inches.

The majority of tarantulas are black or brown. Some species, however, exhibit striking colors. Examples are the bright-red leg markings of the Mexican red-legged tarantula, *Brachypelma smithi*, and the deep-blue legs of the cobalt blue tarantula, *Haplopelma lividum*.

Tarantulas, like nearly all spiders, inject venom through their fangs. Despite their fearsome appearance and reputation, there are few if any substantiated reports of a tarantula bite proving fatal to a human. The effects of tarantula venom are not well known, however. While the bites of many New World species are generally reported to be no worse than a wasp sting, some South American species are reputed to be deadly or to cause severe pain, swelling, vomiting, cramps, and shock.

HISTORY: Tarantulas share certain features with the other members of the tarantula suborder. The cephalothorax and abdomen—the front and rear parts of the body, respectively—are approximately round. The eight eyes are closely grouped—there is a pair in the middle and three on each side of the face. They have enormous fangs that strike with a downward motion. They have two pairs of slits on the underside of the abdomen that lead to the respiratory organs, or book lungs. The book lungs consist of many folds that lie close together like the pages of a book. Blood passes through each “page” to pick up oxygen from the outside air.

HABITS AND HABITATS: Tarantulas inhabit tropical to temperate regions in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, South and Central America, Mexico, and the southwestern United States. They are seen in a variety of habitats, including desert scrublands, but most species live in rainforests.