

SPIDERLINGS

I am a baby spider
as tiny as can be
My mother laid me as an egg
with many more like me
I stay inside my silken sac
As snug as I can be
I am a baby spider
as tiny as can be

Fall is the perfect time to learn about baby spiders, called spiderlings. Spiders that hunt, like wolf spiders and jumping spiders, lay eggs that hatch in fall. Other spiders lay eggs that hatch in spring.



A mother spider watches as her babies leave the egg sac.
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Spiders spin a silk sac in which to lay their eggs. A spider can lay hundreds of tiny eggs at one time. They may lay more than one sac, with each sac holding several hundred eggs. Some mothers stay with their egg sacs until they hatch. Other spider mothers hide the sac in the web or under a leaf. The wolf spider carries the sac with her. When the babies hatch, they climb onto her back. She carries them until their first molt. (See photo below.)



Spiderlings cling to the back of a mother wolf spider.
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It can take a few weeks before the eggs hatch. Egg sacs of some kinds of spiders don't hatch until the spring. When the young spiderlings hatch, they stay in the sac until after their first molt. Molting is when a spider sheds its skin, called an exoskeleton. As it grows, a spiderling will molt four to twelve times until it is an adult, usually in a year.



Spiderlings often cluster together until they are ready to find new homes. ©2004 Randy Lorange, photo

When spiderlings leave the egg sac, they may stay clustered together for awhile. Then they must move away to find food. So many spiders cannot stay in one spot if there is to be enough food for all. Some spiderlings will walk to a new place. Other spiderlings "balloon." When a young spider balloons, it points its abdomen in the air and sends out a long thread of very fine silk, called gossamer. Wind catches the light thread and carries the spider away. Spiderlings have been known to travel long distances doing this, although most don't go far. You may have seen the grass or plants covered with a thin layer of fine silk thread when thousands of spiderlings balloon at the same time.

Question: Why do mother spiders spin egg sacs to hold their eggs?