

# Tarantula taxonomy and distribution

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Tarantulas are arthropods, which means that they are classified with other spiders, insects, and crustaceans (shrimp, crabs) in the phylum Arthropoda. Within the phylum Arthropoda are different groups, the class Arachnida is the group that contains all spiders (including tarantulas), as well as things like scorpions and ticks. Within that group, all spiders are organized into the order Araneae and finally all tarantulas are grouped into the family Theraphosidae. Within the family Theraphosidae, all tarantulas that occur in the United States belong to the genus *Aphonopelma*. The taxonomic classification of tarantulas therefore looks like this:

Kingdom Animalia (all animals)  
Phylum Arthropoda (spiders, insects, crustaceans)  
Class Arachnida (spiders, scorpions, ticks)  
Order Araneae (all spiders)  
Family Theraphosidae (all tarantulas)  
Genus *Aphonopelma*

Worldwide, there are approximately 800 species of tarantulas. Tarantulas occur on most of the major continents with the exception of Antarctica. Species diversity is highest in the warm, tropical climates of Central and South America, Africa, and Asia. There are just over 40 different tarantula species in the United States. This number is apt to change as tarantula taxonomy is in a relative state of disarray and needs further work by trained taxonomists. In the U.S., tarantulas can be found from California, into Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, south into Mexico, and westward into Texas and Oklahoma. Tarantulas in North America reach their eastern limit in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Missouri. No tarantulas occur naturally east of the Mississippi River, though some species have been accidentally introduced into Florida.



Distribution of tarantula species in the United States