CARESHEET FOR ALL EXOTICS WE REHOME

Tarantula Caresheet

Before you buy a tarantula you should think about the conditions it will need to live a long and healthy life. Many tarantulas die in the first few days because their new owner hasn't prepared a suitable home for them. First decide what you want to buy because a small spiderling will obviously require very different accommodation to a full grown specimen.

I will assume you are buying a medium-sized tarantula in which case you will need to provide the following.

Housing

Pet shops will sell suitable tanks in glass or plastic and the size should not be less than about 25cm by 20cm by 20cm high. If you want to create a tank that tries to provide natural conditions (for example rain forest with leaf litter, logs etc.) then you will need a much larger tank, but you won't see your spider very often! I would suggest that you begin with the simple tank without unnecessary contents so that you can watch your tarantula's activities.

Substrate (Ground cover)

A 5cm layer of Vermiculite should cover the bottom of the tank and a thin layer of chipped bark or cocoa fibre placed on top of that. These can be purchased from most garden centres and should be kept damp to keep up the humidity levels in the tank. Potting compost should not be used as it really needs to be sterilised and changed frequently. If your tarantula is a terrestrial species that likes to dig then you may need up to 15cm of substrate and a larger tank.

Heating

A temperature of 21-24°C is required for most of the tarantulas that you should buy as a beginner. If you have a centrally heated room which stays at that temperature all the time

then you won't need extra heating during the winter, but you will between spring and autumn when the heating is switched off.

A good pet shop that sells reptiles and spiders will have a variety of thermostatically controlled heating devices including underground cables and heating mats. Tell them the size and type of tank that you are using and they will recommend a suitable heater for you. An alternative is a seed propagator which can be purchased from garden centres. You can keep your tank inside it. Red light bulbs are not suitable for heating spider tanks.

Humidity

The humidity in the tank should not be less than 50-60% and you should buy an accurate humidity gauge to put inside the tank. If the humidity drops below 50% your tarantula may die during its next moult. You can keep the humidity high by dampening the substrate. Misting the tank using a plant mister can also help, especially for arboreal species, but be aware that the water droplets can evaporate quickly. If you are using a plant mister then you should make sure that it has been washed thoroughly if it's been used for any plant fertiliser or other chemicals. Also, keep a check on the tank to make sure no mould develops.

Feeding

Crickets and locusts are usually available from pet shops that sell tarantulas and reptiles, and you can try other livestock too such as wax worms. A tarantula of about 3-4cm in body length will eat 2-3 crickets per week but they will not over eat so any crickets not being eaten may indicate that you are overfeeding your tarantula or it is preparing for a moult.

If you keep live food for your tarantula then you should also ensure that the live food is kept in appropriate conditions (adequate space, correct temperature and humidity and access to food and water).

Water

Water is vital to your tarantula. It can survive for weeks without food but quickly die without water. A small container such as a coffee jar lid half-full of water will provide drinking water and help keep the humidity up.

Moulting

As your tarantula grows it will moult (shed its skin in a process called ecdysis) regularly, 2-3 times a year in the case of the half grown individual. Signs of an approaching moult are darkening of the colour and the spider will stop feeding.

When feeding stops, remove any live food in case they irritate the spider, or worse, nibble it while it is helpless during the moult. Normally the spider will turn on its back to moult and lie still in that position for several hours. Do not disturb it in any way at this time as activity may prove fatal. Feed it about 7-10 days after moulting when its new skin has hardened.

Suggested species

For your first tarantula you don't want an aggressive, difficult to keep or very expensive specimen. The following are ideal species:

- Chilean Rose (*Grammostola spatulatus* / *G. cala*)
- Entre Rios (*Grammostola inheringii*)
- Curly Haired (*Brachypelma albopilosa*)
- Red Rump (*Brachypelma vagans*)
- White Collared (*Pterinopelma saltator*)

Additional considerations

Urticating hairs

Most species of tarantula possess urticating hairs. These hairs are a defensive hair that can cause itching/irritation of the skin or more severe problems if hairs enter the eye. Care should be taken when handling tarantulas or cleaning out their enclosure. Tarantulas may also rub their back legs across their abdomen to flick hairs upwards if they feel threatened.

Bites

All tarantulas are capable of biting (since this is how they feed). Many species are docile and rarely bite as a means of defence but others are more aggressive. Biting is often a last resort and different species have different threat behaviours (for example, raising the front pairs of legs, showing their fangs or hissing by rubbing their chelicerae together) which indicate that they feel threatened. It is important that you can recognise these behaviours or, better still, avoid doing anything that makes your tarantula feel threatened.

You may also find our page on Arachnids interesting.

Remember: it is important that you know the needs and requirements of your pet before you obtain the animal. You should never, ever obtain an animal before researching its needs and preparing the housing and conditions.

Scorpion Caresheet

Scorpions belong to a fairly small order Scorpiones within the class Arachnida. In total there are only some 1,500 species which have been recorded although doubtless others await discovery. All scorpions are nocturnal and the majority come from tropical areas although we do have one introduced species here in the UK (*Euscorpius flavicaudis*). Throughout the day most species remain underground in self dug burrows although some species (mainly Bark Scorpions of the Genus *Centruroides*) rest above ground, hanging from rocks and branches or under loose bark. As far as invertebrates go scorpions are relatively long lived with some species reaching 6-7 years.

Reasons for owning a scorpion

First and foremost the reasons for owning a scorpion should never ever include "for the thrill of it". Owning a scorpion so that you can show off to your friends is an extremely irresponsible attitude. The only reason for keeping scorpions is to observe a brilliant animal which, if cared for properly, will do well in captivity.

Housing

Most species of scorpion can be kept in small groups and require relatively little in the way of specialised housing. The main requirements (as they are for most invertebrate pets) are that the enclosure is secure and can be maintained at an appropriate temperature and humidity. Scorpions are best kept in a glass aquarium with a good escape proof preferably lockable lid. Many scorpions are good climbers although these species tend to be the more dangerous ones and are not recommended.

The type of substrate used in your terrarium depends on the particular species of scorpion you own, these fall in to two very basic types: Forest species and Desert Species.

Forest species for example those belonging to the genera *Pandinus* and *Heterometrus* come from Africa and Asia and require warm, humid conditions. A deep layer of peat-free compost (6-7cm) should be placed in the terrarium, this can be covered with orchid bark chippings. The top of the substrate should be sprayed with water every day or so but never to a degree that it becomes very wet. Care should be taken that the substrate does not become mouldy or covered in fungus.

Desert species for example those from the genera *Centruroides*, *Buthus* and *Androctonus* (plus many others) require considerably drier conditions. The terrarium should be filled with approximately 10cm of coarse sand, desert scorpions require little moisture and rarely need to be misted.

You can decorate the terrarium with some flat pieces of wood, cork bark or pieces of ceramic plant pot which not only make the enclosure look more attractive but give your scorpions something to burrow under.

Heating

Scorpions are nocturnal and as such have no positive requirement for light. The best method for heating the tank is to use a heatmat. A suitably sized heatmat can be bought from you local pet shop (normally those selling lizards and other reptiles have a good range). A good heatmat should maintain the terrarium temperature at 25°C. You should position the heatmat so that it covers approximately one third of the base of the terrarium. This produces a temperature gradient and the scorpions can move between warm and cooler areas to regulate their body temperature.

It is important to note that if the temperature is too great the scorpions will **burrow** into the substrate to avoid the heat, unfortunately this brings them closer to the heatmat and there is a danger they will over heat and die. It is for this reason that the heatmat should **not cover the entire base** of the terrarium and it may be worth turning off the mat during particularly warm summer spells (this obviously depends on where you live).

An alternate approach that avoids the issue of scorpions burrowing towards the heatmat is to attach the heatmat to the side of the tank rather than position it underneath. This allows the scorpion to burrow safely or cool itself by moving to the side furthest from the heatmat.

It is also strongly recommended that scorpion keepers use thermometers (such as those availble for use with reptiles) to monitor the temperatures at various places within the tank and ensure a good temperature gradient is maintained.

Feeding

All scorpions are carnivores eating insects, spiders and even small lizards and snakes. The amount of food required by your scorpion will depend on the species and size. A large scorpion (eg *Pandinus imperator*) will often eat two or three adult crickets a week. It is best to feed your scorpions at night so that their behaviour pattern will more closely resemble that of wild scorpions. The scorpions will not feed properly if kept in unsuitable conditions so left over food may be an indication that something is not right.

If you keep live food for your scorpion then you should also ensure that the live food is kept in appropriate conditions (adequate space, correct temperature and humidity and access to food and water).

Handling

The best rule is to never handle you scorpion. Species belonging to the Genus *Pandinus* or *Heterometrus* are generally considered docile and relatively harmless however other species are potentially lethal. If you must handle your scorpions it is best to do so very gently with a long pair of foam tipped forceps.

Species available

Of the 1,500 species of scorpion some 100 species have a sting which can be dangerous to humans. However, only experts can tell the difference between many scorpions and there is

no way of knowing which are the most dangerous. Often you must rely on your supplier to identify them correctly. If you are not confident that he or she has the necessary expertise, buy your scorpions elsewhere.

Recommended species

Pandinus imperator: The Imperial Scorpion/Emperor Scorpion. One of the biggest species of scorpion and probably the best for a novice. These scorpions can grow to some 15cm in length. They are black in colour although they do appear to have a green tinge in a certain light. They originate from West Africa and should be kept in a warm humid habitat as described above. The sting of *Pandinus imperator* is frequently described as being like that of a bee. However, it is worth remembering that some people develop serious allergic reactions to bee stings.

Recently other *Pandinus* species have become available. However, these have not been properly identified and are often more aggressive. They are smaller than Emperor scorpions and are generally labeled as Red Claw Scorpions by traders. Not recommended for novice scorpion owners.

Scorpions belonging to the Genus *Heterometrus* are often as large as Emperor scorpions and should be kept in much the same way. They originate from forests in Asia and also make good pets, their sting is said to be of similar potency as that of *Pandinus*. The most commonly available species are *Heterometrus spinifer* (Thai Black) and *Heterometrus javanensis* (Javanese Jungle Scorpion).

Species not recommended for the novice

Hadrurus sp: Hairy Scorpions. A large scorpion (10cm) which does well in the desert setup described above and requires no water (getting all it needs from the atmosphere) - they dislike being misted. They are also considerably more aggressive than Emperor Scorpions with a more potent sting.

Scorpions from the Genus *Androctonus* are relatively large scorpions from Africa and the Middle East. They are extremely dangerous and care should be taken as some of the larger species (particularly *A. bicolor*) have a passing resemblance to the Emperor Scorpion - make sure you are confident that your dealer knows exactly what they are selling. *Androctonus bicolor* have more slender pedipalps (commonly called pincers or claws) than *Pandinus imperator* and a much thicker tail. Note: Narrow pedipalps on a scorpion often indicate a potent sting.

Bark Scorpions (eg *Centruroides* and *Tityus*) should also be avoided by those new to keeping scorpions. Bark scorpions can be recognised as they carry their tail curled to the side of the body rather than arching over the top (ie. the traditional image of scorpions).

Further information on the Arachnids.

HERE'S WHAT YOU WILL NEED TO CARE FOR YOUR NEW BALL PYTHON(S):

What You Will Need For Your Ball Python's Enclosure:

Terrarium Size

There are many different ways to keep a Ball python. The most popular way is to keep your baby Ball python in a 15-20 gallon terrarium. If you are looking to become a breeder, look into purchasing a rack system. Rack systems are the best way to keep medium to large collections of Ball pythons where you can connect Flexwatt heat tape to share heat. *** In our opinion, baby Ball pythons will feel safer if you start them in an enclosure smaller than 25 gallons. Then, as your Ball python grows, go ahead and increase the size of their enclosure. ***

Go BioActive!

A really cool thing to do for your Ball Python is to create a Bioactive Vivarium which includes creating a natural living space with plants, substrate and living organisms that act like a cleanup crew in the enclosure.

Housing Multiple Ball Pythons: Do not cohabit your Ball Pythons. Yes, some people do successfully cohabit their snakes, but it is not a good ideal at all. Your Ball pythons can become stressed out or injured. The only time you should have two snakes together is during breeding.

Water Dish: Water is very important for your Ball python and should be in their enclosure at all times. Make sure to NOT use distilled water for your reptile. If you do not know if your tap water is safe, we would suggest using bottle water like spring water. Also, you can you the product: "ReptiSafe® water conditioner which is great for water bowls and removes chloramines and chlorine, detoxifies ammonia and nitrites, and provides essential ions and electrolytes which help to hydrate newly acquired animals."

Substrate: Do not use sand or cedar substrate. Safe options: Reptile Prime, Repti Bark and Newspaper/Paper Towel. I am really happy that we have had such positive feedback about our Reptile Prime substrate and I can honestly say it is one of the best substrates on the market to use for Ball pythons. If you are interested in purchasing a bag, please go to ReptilePrime.com to place your order. The substrate is also available on Amazon Prime. Canadian customers are not able to purchase thru the website, but they can purchase thru Amazon Prime.

Hides: It is best if you have two hides, one on the hot side and one on the cool side. Your Ball python will be able to comfortably regulate their temperature having a hide on both sides.

Hygrometer:

I am always surprised how many keepers opt out of purchasing this very important tool for keeping most reptiles. A hygrometer is a very inexpensive piece of equipment that allows you to measure the humidity in your reptile's enclosure.

Thermometer:

In order to make sure that your temperatures are correct in your Ball python's enclosure, we believe it is a MUST to make sure to purchase at LEAST one. We highly recommend purchasing two so that you are able to measure the temps on both the hot and cool sides. There are many options on the market. Shop around to see where the best deals are. You can also purchase a Digital Infrared thermometer that reads the temperature instantly.

Heating Source:

Heating mat (undertank or side), heat tape, ceramic heat emitters or a basking light. UVB light not required. The easiest and most efficient way to keep a single Ball python is with a basking light or undertank heating mat. This can be easily purchased online.

For larger groups in a rack system, Flexwatt heat tape is a great choice. You can find this either online or at a hardware store. Do you not use heat rocks in your Ball python's enclosure as your python could get burned.

Setting Up The Correct Temperature and Humidity For Your Pet Ball Python

Temperature:

Hot side should be between 85-91°F and should not exceed 93°F as it can begin to kill calories in your Ball python. Cool side should be about 80°F.

Humidity:

Ball pythons on average need to have about 60% humidity in their enclosure. Babies sometimes need a little bit higher. My personal tip is that if your Ball python has problems shedding you may need to raise your humidity slightly. Just a few ways to add increase humidity: dampen bedding with a spray bottle, larger water dish. cover screen top 75% with a towel, place a humidifier in the same room, place a waterfall feature in the enclosure and adding live plants. Keep in mind if you live in an area that gets cold and dry in the winter, it might be next to impossible to keep the humidity high. Try your best to keep it as close to 60% as possible and refer to the shedding section if you need tips about stuck shed.