

GIANT AFRICAN LAND SNAIL

BACKGROUND

Originating from east Africa but now found across the globe, the Giant African land Snail (*Achatina fulica*), is the largest known terrestrial gastropod. They tend to thrive in hot and humid environments and are considered to be a highly invasive species. They have been found in many different habitats around the world including the edges of forests, riverbanks, agricultural land and even gardens.

Giant African land snails are mostly active at night. They have an average lifespan of 5-7 years but have been known to live up to 10 years when kept in optimal conditions. They can grow up to 20cm in length and tend to be brown in colour with different patterning on their shells.

COMPANIONS

Giant African land snails can be kept alone or in groups. In the wild they tend to be solitary and come together mostly for mating purposes. In tanks however they can sometimes be seen sleeping in groups together, suggesting they may be more social in captivity. It is important to note that snails are hermaphrodite meaning that they have both male and female reproductive parts. This means keeping two snails together can and likely will result in breeding and offspring, so you should be prepared for this if keeping more than one snail.

HOUSING

- Giant African land snails should be kept in a sturdy glass or plastic tank. This should include a lid or covering, as snails will often climb the sides and can escape if not properly contained. Wooden containers cannot be used with snails as they can be chewed and cause trauma when they splinter. They are also difficult to clean and can create an unhygienic environment which can lead to spread of infectious diseases.
- The tank should be located in an area which is out of direct sunlight or draughts. You must also be mindful of chemicals that could come into contact with the snails or their enclosure. Many household cleaners and chemicals are toxic to snails and can be absorbed very quickly across the skin of the snail.
- They should be kept in as large an enclosure as possible. The minimum recommended tank size for two snails is 60 cm x 45 cm x 40 cm. Where possible however tanks should exceed this size particularly if there are more than three snails being housed in the tank.

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- A peat/soil substrate should be used and kept at a depth of at least 4-6cm. This substrate should be kept damp but not completely saturated. Avoid using soil found in gardens or farm/parklands as this can contain pesticides and other chemicals such as fertilizers and are often too stony for snails.
- The walls of the tank should be washed down, and the substrate changed weekly. Ensure no detergents or chemicals are used during this process.
- Giant African land snails do not require additional lighting if they are kept in a room which is lit by indirect sunlight. Snails will tend to avoid coming out in bright direct sunlight, so a slightly shaded area of the room is best.

TEMPERATURES AND HUMIDITIES

- A snail's growth, development and behaviour are closely associated with their environmental temperature. For this reason, close temperature monitoring with a minimum/maximum thermometer is required.
- The ideal temperature for giant African land snails is between 21-23° C. Ensure temperatures do not fall below 18° C or exceed 29° C. Where conditions become too hot or cold snails can become inactive and go into dormancy.
- Giant African land snails prefer a humid environment. Humidity is best measured using a digital hygrometer. The ideal humidity range for these species of snail is between 75-90%. The tank should be misted daily to help maintain humidity levels. If the humidity is dropping too low the soil and inside of the tank can be sprayed more frequently.
- A shallow water bowl should be placed in the enclosure for the snails to drink from. This will in turn also help keep the humidity levels in the correct range. This water should be changed daily and should not exceed 5mm in depth as snails can drown in anything deeper than this.

WHAT TO FEED

- All food offered to snails should be thoroughly washed beforehand to remove any potential pesticides and chemicals. Any food not consumed within 24 hours should then be removed and replaced.
- Leafy greens such as lettuce spinach, cress, watercress, dandelions, and grass can all be offered. They can also eat fresh fruits and vegetables such as apples, cucumbers, bananas, melons, and grapes.
- Giant African land snails require calcium to support their growth. This can be provided with cuttlefish bone, crushed eggshells, natural chalk or powdered calcium formulated supplements.

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