

TARANTULA CARE

There are over 800 species of tarantula. This handout is a general guide for some of the more common species, e.g.

- **Mexican Red Knee** (*Brachypelma smithi*)
- **Chilean Rose** (*Grammostola rosea*)
- **Goliath Bird Eater** (*Theraphosa blondi*)
- **Curly Haired Tarantula** (*Brachypelma albopilosum*)
- **Pink Toe Tarantula** (*Avicularia avicularia*)* - a tree climbing / arboreal species
- **Brazilian Black and White** (*Nhandu coloratovillosus*)
- **Brazilian White Knee/White Banded** (*Acanthoscurria geniculata*)
- **Brazilian Black** (*Grammostola pulchra*)
- **Brazilian Salmon Pink** (*Lasiodora parahybana*)

HOUSING

- All tarantulas should be housed separately to avoid cannibalism.
- Arboreal species should be housed in tall enclosures with cage furniture that allows climbing. Terrestrial species can injure themselves if their cage is too tall so their enclosure height should ideally be restricted to the length of their body.
- Glass or plastic containers are most suitable, avoid mesh topped enclosures as their feet can get caught in the wire.
- An escape proof enclosure is essential, both for your house mate's piece of mind and especially to curtail male spiders escaping to roam in search of females (although females are more common in the pet trade).
- Providing hides is important such as wooden tunnels, half plant pots tipped on the side or strategically placed clear burrows so you can see the spider from the side of the tank. Be sure to keep the burrow covered the majority of the time with a sheet of newspaper or towel on the outside of the tank so as not to disturb the spider. Avoid cage furniture that could potentially injure your tarantula such as rocks and cacti.

SUBSTRATES

- Vermiculite, which can be purchased from garden centres, is a safe, suitable substrate for spiders from arid or humid environments, and is cheap and easy to clean. Some spiders do not like the feel of it and may web the

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- surface or refuse to walk on it. It is not suitable for burrowing but can be used in conjunction with hides and man-made burrows.
- Potting soil is another alternative, but care should be taken to make sure it does not contain fertilizers.
- Coconut fibre (coir) can be used for spiders requiring humid environments.
- There is also a selection of commercially available substrates, suitable specifically for tarantulas.

Unsuitable substrates

- Sand is too abrasive and can lead to damage of the cuticle.
- Gravel may cause damage to their feet and poses a risk should they fall.
- Wood shavings/bark chips may lead to mite infestations and aromatic wood contains volatile oils which can irritate spiders. They also do not allow for burrowing.

TEMPERATURE

Many sources recommend temperatures of 23 – 30°C (74 – 88 F). However, supplemental heat other than room heating in winter is not normally required. Heat lamps and heat pads are unnatural and can lead to desiccation of the substrate and spider. The most important consideration is not the temperature per se, but to avoid significant temperature *fluctuations*. We recommend the use of maximum and minimum digital thermometers to record temperature variation and keeping the spider in a warm room rather than providing heat through mats and lights.

LIGHTING

Spiders have an aversion to strong lighting and should be kept away from bright lights. Ultraviolet (UV) lighting is not necessary. Heat lamps can lead to desiccation and are not recommended. Tarantulas typically do well with general room lighting.

HUMIDITY

- Maintenance of a steady humidity is vitally important to avoid dehydration and desiccation. An accurate hygrometer should be used to measure the humidity, with around 60 – 65% suiting most species (75% for Goliath Bird Eaters, Brazilian salmon pink and Brazilian pink toed tarantulas).
- Water should be provided in a shallow dish.
- Avoid moist cotton wool or sponges etc which may harbour bacteria.
- Water should be changed twice weekly, more frequently if they defecate in the dish. The substrate can be sprayed to maintain humidity levels, but spiders should never be misted directly.

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FEEDING

Variety in the diet is important to minimise dietary deficiencies. Offer a selection of captive bred invertebrates such as various cricket species, locusts, *Musca* flies, *Drosophila* fruit flies (for young spiders) and wax worms in small quantities. The feeding of meat and prey items such as pinkies is not recommended due to the likelihood of obesity and other health problems. Mealworms are of low nutritional value and will bury into the substrate so are not typically recommended.

HANDLING

- Minimal handling is advised to reduce the likelihood of injury to both parties.
- Tarantulas are at risk of nicotine poisoning from heavy smokers and exposure to other toxins from people's hands.
- Injury is possible from accidental dropping, so if handling is necessary wash your hands thoroughly and handle at a low height over a surface.
- All spiders are capable of inflicting a nasty bite and even individuals of reportedly more docile species will exhibit differing tendencies to inflict injury when handled.
- Some species such as the Goliath Bird Eater and Mexican Red Knee have irritant urticating hairs which they release in defence. Hair loss over the abdomen can be a sign of excessive release of these hairs due to stress.
- Latex gloves and protective eye wear is advisable as some people are sensitive and may develop severe skin reactions and breathing difficulties when exposed to these hairs.