

GIANT MILLIPEDES INFO SHEET

Millipedes are ancient creatures. Their ancestors were among the very first animals to have crawled from the prehistoric seas to live permanently on land some 420 million years ago, long before the dinosaurs even evolved.

Of the 12,000 species of millipedes known from across the world today, at least 1,000 species qualify as being classified as “giants”, being greater than 5 cm in length.

While the word *millipede* means “thousand feet”, most giant millipedes actually have around 200 legs, with the record being about 400.

All millipedes are herbivores. Many species can secrete foul-smelling or irritant liquids, but are otherwise harmless to humans. These gentle giants all have two pairs of legs per body segment and they walk by moving their legs in synchronised “Mexican wave” motions that ripple along their body length.

The very biggest giant millipedes can grow up to 38.5 cm long, and some have brightly coloured body segments of alternating stripes of black, red, yellow, grey or brown.

Image 1: A North American millipede, *Narceus americanus*;

Image 2: Many millipedes have brightly coloured body segments;

Image 3: A rusty giant millipede, *Trigoniulus corallinus*.



How to keep a giant millipede

The following is a brief summary and does not include all of the information required to look after these exquisite creatures. If you are interested in keeping giant millipedes, please refer to the ten page giant millipedes chapter in the *Weird and Wonderful Pets* book.

Giant millipedes are really easy to keep, and many species will live for up to seven years in captivity. The closely related pill millipedes and plated millipedes share essentially the same care requirements, and all can be kept successfully in a variety of enclosures, including small glass or plastic fish tanks or terraria.

Select an enclosure that is at least 3 times as long, wide and high as the length of your millipede. Part fill the enclosure with a layer of 10-15 cm of rich leaf litter that includes lots of rotting leaves (if possible, oak or beech) and wood debris.

Place a shallow water bowl or dish in the enclosure and fill with about 3 mm of chlorine-free fresh water so that your millipedes may drink when required. Also add a large piece of bark for millipedes to hide under, as most species are nocturnal.

The majority of giant millipedes originate from tropical regions and so need relatively warm conditions of approx. 20–28°C. Heating can easily be achieved by using a heat pad. Do not put the heat pad underneath the enclosure. Millipedes have an instinct to bury themselves when they are too hot, so sadly, may dig deeper and deeper toward a heat pad to their deaths. Instead, place your heat pad on one side of their enclosure, so only part of their habitat is warmed.

Giant millipedes eat a wide variety of vegetables and fruit, but they particularly like slices of carrots, cucumber, lettuce and apples. Remove uneaten food regularly before mould develops.

Male and female giant millipedes look identical except that males lack a pair of legs close to their head and instead have stumpy gonopods. Many species of giant millipedes breed easily in captivity, giving rise to white, worm-like babies.

For more information, see the *Weird and Wonderful Pets* book.

Image 4: All giant millipedes can roll up into a coil to hide from enemies;

Image 5: Pill millipedes are heavily armoured and can roll into a tight ball;

Image 6: Plated millipedes have defensive plates on their body segments.



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**Buy the *Weird and Wonderful Pets* book
to discover the biology, ecology, diversity
and how to keep giant millipedes.**

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