

# SCORPIONS INFO SHEET

Scorpions are the ultimate predators! With a venomous sting, crushing claws and armour plating, these miniature hunters can overwhelm animals bigger than themselves.

Of the 1,750 species of scorpions that occur worldwide, most are found in tropical and sub-tropical regions. While all true scorpion possess venom, most species prefer to kill their victims with the brute force of their claws. Venom is costly to produce, and so it is usually reserved for paralyzing really large victims, or as a defence against attacking enemies.

Despite popular belief, not all scorpions are dangerous. Indeed, of all the known scorpion species, only 25 have venom that can be fatal to humans.

True scorpions can be divided into two general groups: (1) desert scorpions, which are often small, generally yellow or light brown, and have weak pincers but powerful venom; and (2) forest scorpions that are often large, dark brown or black, with powerful claws but (often) relatively mild venom.

Scorpions are often confused with two related, but far less well known groups of arachnids: (1) vinegaroons, which lack stinging tails and pincers, and instead spray acid and are armed with powerful crushing limbs; and (2) tailless whip scorpions, which are an ancient group of (mostly) cave dwelling arthropods that have massively expanded pedipalps (mouth parts) covered with spines. The pedipalps stretch out in the darkness and snap together with lightning speed to catch unwary prey and drag it to the animals ferocious jaws.

Scorpions, vinegaroons and tailless whip scorpions are all amazingly intricate creatures, and when examined closely, each has its own unique beauty and fascinating adaptations.

Image 1: The Emperor scorpion *Pandinus imperator*;

Image 2: Desert scorpions typically have small claws by potent venom;

Image 3: Tailless whip scorpions has massive mouth parts;

Image 4: Vinegaroons spray acid and crush prey with modified claws.





# How to keep a scorpion

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 scorpions, please refer to the fourteen page scorpions chapter in the *Weird and Wonderful Pets* book.

Most scorpions, vinegaroons and tailless whip scorpions are relatively easy to keep, and many species live for up to seven years in captivity. All three groups share the same basic 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 30 cm long, wide and tall, and preferably with a lockable lid. For forest scorpions, vinegaroons and tailless whip scorpions, place into the enclosure a 6-7 cm deep layer of soil or compost, topped with bark chippings. The enclosure should be sprayed with chlorine-free water every few days, but never soaked. Desert scorpions require less moisture, and need a layer of coarse sand, and misting every two weeks.

Forest and desert scorpions and vinegaroons like a flat piece of bark under which they can hide during the day. Tailless whip scorpions prefer to hang upside-down, and so need a large piece of bark leant against one side of the enclosure to form a hangout. All of these arachnids are mostly active at night.

As most scorpions, vinegaroons and tailless whip scorpions originate from tropical and sub-tropical regions. They need relatively warm conditions of approx. 20–28°C. Heating can easily be achieved by using a heat pad which should be placed at one side of their enclosure so only part of their habitat is warmed and there is always a cool of zone to retreat to. All scorpions, vinegaroons and tailless whip scorpions only eat live prey, such as crickets available from your local reptile shop.

Do not handle pet scorpions, vinegaroons or tailless whip scorpions due to the potential injuries that these creatures can inflict. However, shine an ultraviolet light on your pet scorpion in its tank, and it will glow an eerie shade of green!

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

Image 5: A forest scorpion, *Opisthacanthus madagascariensis*, eating prey;

Image 6: Young scorpions ride on the back of their mother;

Image 7: For an unknown reason, scorpions glow under ultraviolet light.



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

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