

STICK AND LEAF INSECTS

INFO SHEET

Stick and leaf insects (also known as Phasmids) are nature's masters of disguise. At least 6000 species occur worldwide, of which around 300 species have been reared in captivity. In the wild, stick and leaf insects are found on every continent except Antarctica, although most occur across tropical and sub-tropical latitudes.

Generally, stick insects have narrow, cylindrical bodies, whereas leaf insects have thin, flat body shapes that closely resemble foliage. The diversity of both groups is astounding, and individual species vary greatly in shape, size and colour.

All stick and leaf insects are herbivores. Most species are defenceless and rely on their (often remarkable) camouflage for protection from enemies. Some species of stick insects do have spines on their limbs and bodies, others can spray smelly liquids, or release toxic secretions, or flash brightly coloured wings to startle attackers. A few species have enlarged, spine-like spurs on their rear legs which they can use as defensive weapons against attackers.

Image 1: An adult female leaf insect, *Phyllium westwoodi*;

Image 2: An adult female giant prickly stick insect, *Extatosoma tiaratum*;

Image 3: The head of the Indian stick insect, *Carausius morosus*.



How to keep stick and leaf insects

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 stick and leaf insects, please refer to the sixteen page stick and leaf insects chapter in the *Weird and Wonderful Pets* book.

Stick and leaf insects make great pets. Many species are easy to care for and will live for 1 year or more in captivity. Stick and leaf insects can be kept in a variety of enclosures, including fish tanks made of glass or plastic, mesh butterfly boxes or terraria. The enclosure should be at least 3 times as long, wide and high as the length of adults of the species that you wish to keep. This is to provide plenty of space for your pets to move around and shed their skins.

Each species of stick and leaf insect has its own specific requirements concerning temperature, humidity and food leaves (see the stick and leaf insects chapter in the *Weird and Wonderful Pets* book). Many species need heating, others can be kept at room temperature. All require leaves (as food), which should be placed into the enclosure as small branches stood in a pot of water with a cover to prevent the insects from falling in and drowning. Most stick and leaf insects need to be sprayed frequently to provide droplets of water for the insects to drink.

Most stick insects can be kept together regardless of species or age. However, it is advisable to rear leaf insects separately from stick insects, as the camouflage of leaf insects can be so perfect that stick insects may accidentally chew through leaf insects' legs or bodies mistaking them for real foliage.

Adult female stick insects may lay up to 2000 eggs. The hatchlings (nymphs) are often miniatures of the adults, and can usually be reared under the same conditions.

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

Image 4: An adult Indian stick insect, *Carausius morosus*;

Image 5: Many stick insects are colourful, such as this female *Calvisia* spp.;

Image 6: An adult female black beauty stick insect, *Peruphasma schultei*;

Image 7: An adult female jungle nymph *Heteropteryx dilatata*;

Image 8: An adult female giant spiny stick insect, *Eurycantha calcarata*.



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

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