

TARANTULAS INFO SHEET

Tarantulas are among the most feared of all the world's animals. But this fear is misplaced; many smaller spider species are far more dangerous. There are over 900 species of tarantulas distributed across the tropical, subtropical and warm temperate areas of the world. Most tarantula species are mildly venomous - there is not a single case of a tarantula bite causing a human fatality.

Tarantulas come in all shapes, sizes and colours. The very biggest species are up to 30 cm across. Many of the large species of tarantulas can eat not just insects, but even birds. The bird-eating tarantulas of South America detect their avian prey by sensing vibrations in the ground. When prey is close, the spiders pounce on their victim, injecting it with venom using their two-centimetre-long fangs! In parts of Peru, there are local legends of similar spiders taking chickens!

Like all spiders, tarantulas have eight legs and eight eyes (2 large round eyes close to the animal's mouth parts, surrounded by 3 eyes on each side). Many species are covered with long hairs, and some tarantula species can flick the hairs at enemies when threatened. Many tarantulas have spinnerets at the base of the abdomen for spinning silk, and some species can also spin silk from the tips of their toes!

Image 1: A Mexican red knee tarantula, *Brachypelma smithi*;

Image 2: The Indian blue tarantula, *Poecilotheria metallica*;

Image 3: The Chaco golden knee tarantula, *Grammostola pulchripes*.



How to keep a tarantula

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

Many tarantulas are easy to rear, and some species can live for up to 20 years in captivity. Select an enclosure that is at least 30 cm long, 30 cm wide and 30 cm tall, and preferably with a lockable lid. Glass or plastic fish tanks work well.

Place into the enclosure a 6-7 cm deep layer of vermiculite, coconut fibre, sphagnum moss, sterilised soil, compost, or peat. Give your tarantula a daytime hiding spot; e.g. a large piece of bark, a hollowed log, a ceramic plant pot or a vase. Consider adding a compact pot plant, some drift wood or tree branches to allow your tarantula to climb and explore its habitat.

A small water dish containing 1 cm of chlorine-free water is essential to allow your tarantula to drink. Also, lightly spray the enclosure with chlorine-free water every few days, but avoid soaking the habitat or allowing mould to develop.

Tarantulas need relatively warm conditions of 22–30°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 a cool zone to retreat to.

Feed your tarantulas live prey, such as crickets available from your local reptile shop, or cockroaches, locusts and beetles from your garden. Prey should be smaller than the size of the abdomen of the tarantula that you are feeding. Adult tarantulas will eat around four prey items or so each week, but can survive without food for one month or more.

Tarantulas are territorial and will cannibalise one another, so always keep only one tarantula in each enclosure. Never hold your tarantula, not only because of the risk of being bitten, but because tarantulas are extremely fragile and easily injured.

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

Image 4: A Brazilian giant white knee tarantula, *Acanthoscurria geniculata*;

Image 5: A Mexican fire leg tarantula, *Brachypelma boehmei*;

Image 6: A Venezuelan greenbottle Blue *Chromatopelma cyaneopubescens*.



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

**To order your copy visit:
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