

Hermit Crab Care Sheet

Species: *Coenobita Variabilis*

Average adult size: 2-6 inches long, depending on the species. Reach adult size in 2 years

Average life span: 10 plus years with proper care

Tank size: Minimum of 20 Litres, preferred size (50Litres)- (bigger the better)

Diet: Omnivore

Behaviour: Hermit crabs are very social (keep in groups of at least 3-4). If they are kept on their own or with just one other crab they can fret and stress themselves to death.

Make sure the tank is big enough to house them all as overcrowding can cause fighting.

Make sure there are enough climbing branches, hidey huts for the volume of crabs. They are nocturnal (mostly active at night).

They do normally breed in captivity.

Telling genders can be difficult and harmful to your crab.

What you need to house your Hermit Crab:

- Glass tank (bigger the better) with lid
- Bedding (Kritter's crumbles and treated sand)- fine sand is best as it holds shape of the burrows better than others
- Food dish, fresh water dish, salt water dish (shallow dishes – clean & replace daily)
- Cave and/or Hermie hut (For shelter and to keep warm in)
- Sea sponge (to drink from and maintain moisture)- replace regularly
- Climbing branches (drift wood, natural ladders etc)
- Water conditioner (to condition drinking water, salt bath and spray bottle)
- Hermit crab food (premium)
- Hermit crab salt (this is treated salt, do not use edible human salt)
- Heat mat- (to maintain humidity and moisture) - **MUST HAVE** -
 - **They will die without this (check regularly to make sure it is in working order)**
- Hygrometer (thermometer and hygrometer gauge) – allows precise monitoring of both temperature and humidity in your hermit crabs home – **MUST HAVE**
 - **(Maintain 70-80% humidity at all times)**
- Spare shells (as they grow and moult they require different sized shells to move into, a minimum of 2 spare shells per crab is required)
- UV light – this is required for vitamin D absorption (like us we need UV to absorb calcium, Hermit crabs require natural sunlight or a UVB light during the day, turn this off at night as they are nocturnal)
- Calcium block and/or cuttle bone for added calcium in the diet

DIET:

A well- balance hermit crab diet consists of:

- High quality commercial hermit crab food
- Cuttle bone and/or calcium block for added calcium in the diet

Vegetables:

Spinach, carrots and romaine lettuce and non-citrus fruits (mangoes, coconut and papaya, brine shrimp, and fish flakes can be offered occasionally as treats)

Feeding:

Things to remember when feeding your Hermit Crab:

- Fresh, clean, chlorine free water should be available at all times (sometimes your hermit crab may not drink directly from their bowls, they may rely on the sea sponge or moisture on plants etc)
- Crush all pelleted foods before feeding (fresh food everyday)
- Hermit crabs appreciate variety in their diet (just like us) try and offer different fruits and vegetables daily
- Try and take out uneaten fruit and vegetables in the morning as it may spoil easily and encourage fruit flies

WHAT NOT TO FEED:

Salty foods, processed sugar, rhubarb, greasy foods, Avocado, chocolate, cooked potato, fruit seeds/pips, dried beans (always cook or fully sprout first), alcohol, caffeine, garlic, onion, tobacco, cabbage, raw potato, asparagus, eggplant, milk, cream, sugar and high fat treats.

Fresh water should be supplied each morning, make sure the dish is well scrubbed to remove slime or faecal matter.

Housing

- The first part in setting up a good home for them is to have a glass aquarium (minimum of 20 Litre fish tank should be the minimum size) with a glass lid with plenty of burrowing space.
- Provide climbing objects and hiding areas (they like to climb and play too)
- New shells should be a bit bigger than the current shell
- Hermit crabs are delicate creatures that require a warm humid environment as they breathe through their gills. Because of this, it is vital to their health and survival to ensure their enclosure is constantly monitored for humidity and temperature levels. This can be achieved by using appropriate bedding and ensuring your crabs have a heat mat, hygrometer and appropriately spraying the enclosure with treated water.
- Substrate - Add half Kritter's crumble and half treated sand to maintain humidity (substrate should be 3 inches deep to allow for burrowing)
- Lighting - Hermit crabs are nocturnal, so you may provide a low wattage nocturnal bulb for nighttime viewing or turn off the UV light to encourage a natural behaviors)
- Heat mat – placed under the enclosure (in the warm side)
- Water- keep two shallow water dishes in the enclosure at all times-
 - One is for fresh drinking water (add water conditioning treatment to remove harsh chemicals found in tap water, every time you replace the water dish)
 - The other is for Salt water bathing of condition the skin and aid in moulting

(add conditioning treatment and recommended amount of salt every time you replace the water dish)

- Make sure you replace these daily, clean and remove slime
- Water bowls should be no deeper than 0.25-0.50 inches as they may drown if they cannot climb out, add a sea sponge for safety (replace sea sponge frequently to avoid bacteria growth)
- Spray the tank daily with a misty spray bottle to maintain humidity (the tank does not need to be WET it just needs to have moisture. Adding too much water can make the tank too cold and does not simulate its natural habitat)

Water conditioner MUST be added to ALL water bowls and spray bottle as un-dechlorinated water can burn their gills when exposed to chlorine and causes immense pain which will be fatal.

- House hermit crabs in groups of three or more, but do not house different invertebrate species together.

How can I maintain temperature and humidity so my hermit crabs can breathe?

- Maintain humidity by misting daily (purchase a spray bottle, fill with fresh tap water and add conditioning treatment to neutralise chlorine found in tap water). Adding moisture is required to keep gills moist, prevents dehydration and eases moulting).
- A heat mat must be provided at all times to maintain temperature and humidity levels
- Use correct bedding (sand and Critter's crumble) - to assure your tank will retain moisture and not dry out (**DO NOT USE BEDDING THAT IS TOO DRY.**)
- Temperature gradient (26 degrees Celsius for the warm end (critter crumble's with heat mat) and 21 degrees Celsius for the cool end (sand, water end))

Recommended enrichments:

- Natural treated wood toys (these are great for climbing)
- Loofah shapes (to climb on)
- Treats (as said previously)

Common health issues:

- Mites – Mites appear in the habitat or directly on the crab (this can occur from untreated shells, sand or foreign objects).

Treatment - Completely clean habitat, replace substrate and bathe crab in lukewarm water. Ensure no mites are visible on the crab before returning to clean habitat.

- Loss of limbs – Loss of limbs can be due to stress from an improper environment (humidity, temperature, cleanliness) or fighting with another hermit crab.

Treatment- Ensure habitat is clean and properly set up with humidity and temperature within their preferred range or identify and separate the aggressor

Things to watch out for:

Lethargy, abandons shell and doesn't return, Loss of appetite, Loss of limbs

Remember to monitor your Hermit Crabs health regularly as they can be very good at hiding sickness or disease. If signs of illness occur contact your local small animal Vet for advice.

