



A curious creature that is often misunderstood.

Commonly sold in souvenir shops around the country, the hermit crab is one of the most trafficked and misunderstood animals in the pet trade. Due to their cheap price, small size, and availability, naive buyers are led to believe that hermit crabs are nothing more than a curious trinket when in fact that is simply not the case! While curious (and not a trinket!), hermit crabs are also intelligent, sensitive creatures that require even more sensible care. So if you are looking to add a hermit crab to your home, purchase captive bred when you can, and establish a suitable Crabitat before bringing your new family member home.

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## Lifespan

In the wild, this species can live 30+ years. In captivity, the average lifespan is 3-12 years.

## Size

This species can reach sizes of up to 6" in diameter, which is roughly the size of a baseball or softball.

## Natural History

Originally, the Caribbean Hermit Crab came from the Caribbean Sea where the climate is hot, but they can now be found in Florida, Venezuela, the West Indian Isles, and Bermuda. They inhabit mangrove swamps and coastal forests and wetlands. They are a terrestrial, nocturnal species, traveling for miles at a time under the cover of darkness.

## Housing

The recommended minimum size for a hermit crab is 10 gallons per crab. (ex: four crabs can live in a 40 gallon tank). Aquariums with glass walls are preferred over screen enclosures commonly bought at souvenir shops because it provides hermit crabs with better insulation with limited ventilation to satisfy their tropical needs. Choose an enclosure that is longer than it is high; this gives more surface area for crabs to spread out and establish space. Remember, housing crabs in over-crowded or cramped conditions can lead to stress, aggression, or even death, so it is important that hermit crabs are provided with enough space to stretch those legs!

## Lighting & Heating

As a tropical species, hermit crabs enjoy consistently warm temperatures and high levels of humidity. Therefore, to properly thermoregulate, hermit crabs must be provided with a healthy temperature gradient. This can be achieved by using ultratherm heating pads placed on the outside wall of the tank, not the bottom. Positioning the heating pads this way will ensure that molting crabs, which typically bury themselves beneath the substrate for extended periods of time, will not overheat. Generally, you will want the heating pad to cover the one half to the whole of the back of the enclosure from the rim to the top of the substrate. How large of a heating pad you use depends on the size of the tank and the temperature of your home.

Temperatures on the cooler end of the enclosure should fall around the minimum of 75F. Temperatures at the warmer end of the enclosure should not exceed 85F. Humidity levels should be >70%. Be sure to monitor the temperatures in your hermit crab's enclosure! Measure temperatures and humidity closely with digital thermometers/hygrometers at both warm and cool ends of the tank.

Hermit crabs do not need any special kind of lighting, though exposure to appropriate wavelengths of UV can provide a day/night cycle for your crab and display your pet in its best colors. A basic LED (ones that do not get hot!) may be used to view your crabs during the day, but be sure to turn it off at night, unless it has a night mode.

## Substrates & Cage Décor



The substrate depth and ratio are arguably the most important step of setting up your habitat. It helps maintain humidity and provides a place to molt. Substrate depth should be a minimum of 6" and more may need to be added as the crabs get larger. They need to be able to completely cover themselves and the shell they take with them when they molt.

The substrate itself should be sand castle-like in consistency. The best materials for this are a 5:1 ratio of natural sand and coco fiber. Calcium sand should never be used, as it hardens when wet and will not hold its shape well for burrowing and molting.

As active, nocturnal creatures, your crab will appreciate a cozy, safe place to take naps and places to go to exert their energy. Hides, placed directly on the substrate, will encourage natural burrowing behaviors. Manzanita, cork bark tubes and flats, vines, ropes and ladders, and upside-down cork pots are safe natural hides and/or climbing structures. Beware of pine wood hides, as pine is toxic to hermit crabs.

## Diet & Nutrition

Unfortunately, many commercial hermit crab pellets contain ethoxyquin and copper sulfate which are not safe for crabs. However, they aren't picky and will eat a wide range of organic options like fresh or dried fruits, veggies, nuts, seeds, and even meats! Food can be offered daily in a shallow dish or tray.

Did you know that hermit crabs have gills? While this doesn't mean they can breathe underwater, it does mean they need high humidity and constant access to water or else they may suffocate! These complex little creatures need both freshwater and saltwater pools to choose from (use marine salt for saltwater pools; table salt is not acceptable). These pools need to be deep enough for your crabs to fully submerge and allow them to climb out, so they don't drown. A large textured rock, plastic plants, or plastic mesh are all good pool exit ramps. Do not use sponges in your dishes as these can grow bacteria and be harmful to your crab. Remember to use dechlorinators or spring bottled water for both freshwater and saltwater pools.

## Shells & Molting

Shells! Did you know that as a crustacean, hermit crabs need to molt often to grow? This means shedding their exoskeletons and eventually finding a new shell to accommodate their new growth. Buying shells for your hermit crab to change into is perhaps the most fascinating part about owning a hermit crab! But there are a few things to consider before purchasing your shells, such as size and type. Make sure that you provide your crab with different types of shells. Hermit crabs like to have options! Offer at least 5 shells per hermit crab which are the same size or larger than the current crab's size. Avoid painted shells as the paint will chip with time and is toxic if eaten. Additionally, they usually ignore cone shaped, very spiky, very long, damaged, or narrow opening shells.