



Terrestrial Tarantulas: Beginners Guide.

Tarantulas make perfect pets for the right kind of people. They are interesting to watch, take up relatively little space, and depending on the species, easy to take care of. This care guide is meant to provide you with basic care information for terrestrial tarantulas. That being said, it is best to know your tarantula's scientific name and research which species is right for you.

Lifespan

Lifespan depends on the species, but females typically live longer than males. Tarantulas may live 5 to 35 years.

Size

Size depends on the species. Examples:

Chaco Golden Knee Tarantula (*Grammostola pulchripes*): 7-9" leg span

Chilean Rose Hair Tarantula (*Grammostola rosea/porteri*): 5-6" leg span

Curly Hair Tarantula (*Tliltocatl albopilosum*): 5-6" legs span

Natural History

Terrestrial, or ground dwelling tarantulas, are fossorial in nature. In other words, they stick close to the ground and burrow regularly.

There is a difference between New World and Old World tarantulas.

New World tarantulas use urticating hairs for defense, which are barbed, irritating hairs kicked up from their abdomens as a form of defense. They typically have milder venom and many of them are considered docile. Old World tarantulas lack urticating hairs but will use their fangs and often "medically significant venom" as defense. These fast and feisty spiders demand a bit more experience to care for, have complicated husbandry needs, and should not be handled.

Housing

As a terrestrial species, it is important that your enclosure is wider than it is taller to compliment your tarantula's natural burrowing behavior, but this really depends on the size and species of your tarantula. As a rule of thumb, terrestrial tarantulas can be housed in an enclosure 3x as large as its leg span. Young slings may be kept in small deli cups, dram bottles, or amac boxes while adults may be kept in larger glass or acrylic enclosures, such as those made by Exo Terra or Zoomed.

Cross ventilation is ideal to ensure proper air flow. If making your own, be sure that ventilation holes are not large enough for your spider to slip through or that materials used for ventilation are not susceptible to damage and escape by your spider. As a rule of thumb, ventilation holes drilled into the sides or top of your enclosure should not be larger than ½ of the size of your spider's body.

Lighting & Heating

As a rule of thumb, most tarantula species can be kept at room temperature with no special requirements (68-74F). If you are comfortable then your tarantula is comfortable. It is also important to keep your tarantula's enclosure away from direct sunlight to prevent extreme temperature increases.

If looking to illuminate the enclosure for aesthetic purposes, small LED lights are perfect.

Substrates & Cage Décor



For terrestrial tarantulas, the substrate you chose will aid in the recreation of its natural habitat and ensure a safe and functional environment. Coconut fiber, orchid bark chips, potting soils free of manure and fertilizer, peat moss, and sphagnum moss are suitable for most species. They can even be mixed or layered for a more effective, appealing look.

Most terrestrial tarantulas appreciate a hide, particularly if they are not a species that does not make their own. Cork bark flats/rounds/tubes, sterilized woods, artificial and/or live hardy plants, and most commercially available reptile décor is acceptable.

Diet & Nutrition

Tarantulas are ambush predators, meaning they primarily lie and wait for potential prey to walk by for an opportunistic meal. Your tarantula should be offered gutloaded, dusted insects from tongs, which include appropriately sized fruit flies, crickets, dubia roaches, hornworms, and mealworms to name a few. Ensure that your tarantula is provided with clean water daily in a small, shallow water dish.

Beware! One of the most common mistakes of any new tarantula owner is overfeeding so it is important to develop a feeding schedule. Slings should be offered food every 3-4 days. Juveniles should be fed no more than 1x/week. Adults can be fed every 10-14 days. Do not leave uneaten prey in the enclosure, especially if your tarantula is in premolt or in the process of molting. To reduce harm to your tarantula, ensure that all uneaten prey is removed from the enclosure.

Molting

As a tarantula grows, they undergo a process of shedding their exoskeletons called **molting**. Molting provides new sensory and protective hairs, and helps shed external parasites. Younger spiders may molt as often as once a month while older spiders may molt annually. Prior to molting, your spider's appetite and activity may decrease and begin to develop a dull coloration. When molting, you may find your tarantula lying on its back – it is not dead! It may take 15 minutes to several hours for your spider to molt. As the old exoskeleton is shed, the tarantula's body is soft and vulnerable for several days. It is important that during this time your spider is left alone, not handled, and that prey items such as crickets are not left roaming the enclosure.

Handling & Temperament

For the most part, handling tarantulas is not recommended. However, there are some species that are more docile and will tolerate handling, but this also depends on the specimen. Otherwise, it is in the best interest of this animal that they are kept as display animals only.