Tarantulas

This caresheet is designed to give a basic knowledge of care for all tarantula. To get the exact care requirements you should also ask for a care sheet or information on the exact species you are going to buy. The care in regards to setup & temperatures may change.

Housing:

The tarantula by nature is cannibalistic, therefore they should only ever be housed single unless you are planning to breed them, and have researched and prepared for this. There are primarily two types of tarantula – arboreal, which require height, as they climb, and terrestrial, which will live on the ground, and may burrow. There are a variety of tanks suitable for tarantulas, from glass aquariums, exo terra terrariums, plastic faunariums, or wooden vivariums, depending on what size you are looking for. A very important consideration is that you have a secure lid or closing door – you don't want an escapee!

Substrate is important when housing a tarantula, and we generally recommend using something natural like soil. This can be purchased in condensed bricks which expand with water, or in bags of soil. Do not use soil from the garden as this can contain bacteria and bugs that may cause problems. If you purchase soil from a garden centre, ensure it has no fertilisers or chemicals in it. Most spiders require a high humidity level, and soil provides this. For species that do not require humidity, a soil/playsand mix may be adequate. Some other substrates include orchid bark, wood chippings, moss & vermiculite, but research the correct one for the species you intend to purchase.

It is important to provide a retreat for your tarantula, as they can become stressed when out in the open for too long. Cork bark, branches, plants, manufactured hides & rocks all simulate their natural environment, and can be placed around the enclosure.

Temperature and Light:

The temperature for tarantulas ranges from 70 to 85, with 78 to 82 being the optimum for most species but do check the exact species you intend to purchase. A heat mat is the recommended way of providing this heat. Lights can be used, but should not exceed 25 watts, or a red bulb should be used. However you choose to heat your enclosure, make sure it does not overheat – a thermostat will digitally control your heat devices, switching them on or off as necessary. UVB bulbs can be in a low species but most will not benefit from it. Humidity is extremely important and should generally be kept at 50 – 95% depending on the species. Low humidity will result in dehydration and problematic moults.

Feeding:

Tarantulas are opportunistic hunters in the wild, and will generally eat almost anything offered to them. In captivity they prey easily on crickets, grasshoppers and locusts. It is important to provide an additional calcium source, such as powder dusted onto the prey. Adult spiders should be fed

once or twice a week, whilst younger spiders can eat every second or third day. Water should be provided in a shallow dish - this should be kept clean. Do not provide a large open area of water as tarantula's can drown!

Moulting:

All tarantulas shed their skin, which is called the moult. When they are coming to their moulting season, they may refuse food, and stop moving around. The spider will sometimes have a bald patch on it's abdomen, that darkens as it gets closer to moult. During moulting the spider sheds it's entire exoskeleton. It will spin a web, and then flip over onto it. It may take several hours – or even days for this shed to occur, and the spider should not be touched during this period. Moving it back onto it's front could result in serious injury, or even death. After the shed, the exoskeleton will slowly harden back into that of a normal spider. Prey should not be introduced until 1 week after the shed, and then you can resume as normal. An exoskeleton which is a mimic of the spider will be left behind. This can then be removed.

Handling:

Caution should be taken when handling a spider. Some species are aggressive and simply should not be handled. Aside from the aggressiveness of a spider, urticating hairs on the spiders abdomen can cause a rash or skin complaint. The spider can also "kick" hairs from the back of the leg as a defensive mechanism. Extreme care should also be taken that the spider cannot fall or jump, as even a relatively small fall can rupture the spiders abdomen, resulting in death. Some species can be handled with due care but generally tarantula's are considered a display animal.

Anatomy:

It may be of interest to note the spiders anatomy. This picture shows a Brachypelma smithi Mexican redknee, but the anatomy is the same for all tarantulas.