

need it, therefore care should be taken not to overfeed your pet. Some species of tarantula are known to go without food for a number of months without any impact to their health.

Remove any uneaten live food after 24 hours or immediately if the tarantula begins to moult. It is important to feed the live food a nutritious diet and water to ensure your pet is also receiving a balanced diet. This is also known as 'gut loading' the live food.

Allow your tarantula at least 24 hours to settle into its new home before offering any food.

You should provide fresh, clean drinking water in a very shallow bowl.

HANDLING

The British Tarantula Society advocates a non-handling policy, and therefore recommends that a tarantula is not handled. This is for the safety of the animal as well as the keeper. Tarantulas are delicate animals that are likely to get damaged (potentially lethally) if accidentally dropped. Some tarantulas flick urticating hairs, which can cause skin irritations, and there is also the possible risk of being bitten.

Further reading: The British Tarantula Society (www.thebts.co.uk)

PET CODE OF PRACTICE

Never release a pet (companion animal) into the wild. It is illegal and for most species this will lead to an untimely and possibly lingering death, as they are not native to this country. Any animals or plants that do survive might be harmful to the environment. This includes the need to properly dispose of soiled substrate, so that eggs and live food can't escape into the wild.

SHOPPING LIST

- Suitable housing
- Substrate
- Heat mat
- Thermometers
- Thermostat
- Small water bowl
- Live foods
- Cage furnishings and branches
- Tarantula care book



The Animal Welfare Act 2006 means all pet owners have a legal duty of care to their pets. Anyone who is cruel to an animal or is found not to be providing the five animal welfare needs, as listed below, can be fined and sent to prison.

The Five Animal Welfare needs:

1. **Environment:** Pets should be given the correct housing according to its size, this includes shelter, space to exercise and a secure, comfortable place to rest.
2. **Diet:** Pets should be offered the correct type and volume of food to cover all their nutritional needs alongside access to clean, fresh water.
3. **Behaviour:** All pets should be allowed to exhibit normal behaviour patterns and should be provided with the facilities to do so.
4. **Company:** Some animals require the company of their own kind, whilst others should be kept on their own.
5. **Health:** All animals should be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease, and given veterinary treatment if they become sick or injured.



Remember – you should never release your pet into the wild.

This leaflet is produced by The Pet Charity, a national charity which promotes the joy and benefits of pet ownership.

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This leaflet has been produced with the help of the British Tarantula Society. If you require further help or advice please visit www.thebts.co.uk

The British Veterinary Zoological Society supports the aims of The Pet Charity to secure and enhance the welfare of pet animals. For more information visit www.bvzs.org



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GUIDE TO CARING FOR TARANTULAS

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Tarantulas can make very interesting pets and are typically inexpensive to house and feed.



THE PET CHARITY GUIDE TO CARING FOR TARANTULAS

There are almost 1,000 species of tarantula in the wild and they can be found in America, Africa, Europe, Australia and Asia. They come in a variety of colours and shades, including brown, red and blue.

Tarantulas can live for around 10 years or more, so you must be sure you're ready for a long-term commitment. They are not social animals so they are best kept singularly.

GENERAL CARE

Being nocturnal your tarantula will spend the majority of the day in hiding, only becoming active at night. It is important to offer your tarantula a place to hide within its habitat.

If you are at all worried about the health of your tarantula you should consult your vet as soon as possible. It is recommended to seek a vet that has experience with invertebrates.

Your pet should also be insured against unexpected veterinary costs.

CHOOSING YOUR TARANTULA

If you are choosing your first tarantula it is recommended to pick a species that is relatively docile, such as a Red Knee (*Brachypelma smithi*) or a Chilean Rose (*Grammostola rosea*).

A healthy tarantula will appear well-formed and strong. Its abdomen should appear rounded – a small and/or wrinkled abdomen can indicate dehydration.

HOUSING

A suitably sized escape-proof vivarium with very good ventilation is the most suitable housing for a tarantula. Tarantulas can be very good at escaping, so ensure the lid is secure.

In the wild, tarantulas don't stray far from their hide, so a smaller habitat is preferred. This allows them to feel safe and secure and in complete control of their home. The housing shouldn't be too tall – if your tarantula climbs an artificial plant or decorative item and falls it could seriously injure your pet.

The habitat should be placed out of direct sunlight and draughts.

TEMPERATURE

A heat mat is a good way to provide your tarantula's ideal temperature and your pet shop can advise on a product suitable for your particular set-up.

When using a heat mat always place it at the back or side of the enclosure and never underneath, this is because tarantulas burrow to get away from heat.



DID YOU KNOW?

South American species of tarantulas have urticating spikey bristles (hairs), which they flick off their abdomen if they feel threatened. Other species can make a hissing sound when alarmed, which is known as stridulation.

Tarantulas come from different parts of the world, and therefore their temperature requirements vary depending on species. If your pet shop is unable to advise you of the correct temperature your tarantula should be kept at you can find information from various books or by contacting The British Tarantula Society. You may not need to use a heat mat to reach the required temperature in the summer months.

A digital thermometer can be used in the enclosure to monitor the temperature and any heat mat should be controlled by a thermostat.

It is advised never to use a light-bulb to heat your tarantula's habitat as this will distress your pet due to its nocturnal behaviour.

HUMIDITY

A humidity of around 60 percent will be appreciated by your tarantula. A hygrometer can help you monitor the humidity but is not essential as a normal UK home's humidity is around 40-60 percent.

As tarantulas come from different parts of the world their humidity requirements vary depending on species. If your pet shop is unable to advise you of the correct humidity your tarantula requires and how best to maintain it, you can find information in various books or by contacting The British Tarantula Society.

FURNISHINGS

The floor of the cage should be covered with a suitable substrate, which your pet shop can advise on. For ground-dwelling species substrate should be deep enough to allow your pet to dig and hide. For arboreal species you should provide plenty of artificial plants and branches.



Tarantulas will appreciate a place to rest and hide so you should furnish the habitat with a selection of hides, such as cork bark, which your pet shop can advise on. Artificial plants and branches will offer a place to hide for both ground-dwelling and arboreal species too. As tarantulas are mostly nocturnal, they will usually spend daylight hours hidden under a hide or in a burrow within the substrate.

CLEANING

Tarantula droppings are usually creamy white coloured and will appear from time to time. They can be wiped off the enclosure walls using a wet cloth or paper towel.

After a tarantula has finished eating it is important to remove any discarded remains, these may appear as small dried balls.

It is advised not to perform a full enclosure clean, disinfect and replacement of substrate as it will cause unnecessary stress to your tarantula. Soiled substrate can be replaced when necessary through a regular spot-cleaning regime.

MOULT

Tarantulas grow by shedding their skin, which is called an exoskeleton. Juvenile tarantulas will moult regularly but only once per year as adults. Your pet will typically lose its appetite for a while prior to going into moult.

Many species of spider will lay on their back in their hide on a freshly made web whilst moulting, and should not be disturbed during this time, including by live food. It takes approximately 24 hours for your pet to shed its old skin and around a week for its new exoskeleton to harden, and in the meantime it shouldn't be disturbed or fed.

FOOD AND WATER

Tarantulas are carnivorous and mostly feed on live insects. Feeding should take place once every week or two depending on the age and species of the tarantula.

You can offer a couple of crickets, locusts, roaches or giant mealworms. If your tarantula has a rounded or plump abdomen, it may be an indication that feeding is not required. Tarantulas will often continue to take food if offered regardless of whether they