



\*Photo Credit: Creepy Crawly Creatures

## Death's Head or Discoid Cockroaches (*Blaberus* spp.)

### More Fearsome Sounding than They Really Are

Death's head cockroaches consist of about 10 to 12 species, with *Blaberus craniifer* and *Blaberus discoidalis* being the most commonly kept and seen species as pets or as food for reptiles. Death's head cockroaches can vary in color from blackish or dark brownish, dark reddish brown, yellowish, to beige. They earn their common name of "death's head" from the dark, skull shaped marking on the pronotum (or top of their heads). Adults are also winged, but seldom fly and are poor climbers. Death's head roaches are also a tropical genus of roaches that do not become nuisance or pest species if they escape, making them a hardy and popularly kept genus of roach species.

### Taxonomy

**Life:** All living, physical, and animate entities

**Domain:** Eukaryota

**Kingdom:** Animalia

**Phylum:** Arthropoda

**Class:** Insecta

**Order:** Blattodea

**Family:** Blaberidae

**Genus:** *Blaberus*

**Species:** *Blaberus* spp.\*

\*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

### Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, death's head cockroaches can attain longevity of up to 5 years or potentially more.

### Distribution and Habitat

The death's head and discoid cockroaches are a broadly distributed genus of cockroaches, with species occurring throughout much of Central and South America. More specifically, different species of these cockroaches may be found throughout Mexico, Guatemala, Panama, Colombia, Venezuela, Brazil, Trinidad, Tobago, Guyana, Suriname, and French Guiana. Other species can occur in Cuba, Jamaica, Haiti, Puerto Rico, and a few other introduced localities such as Florida in the southeastern United States. Within these ranges, they may be found in dark and moist micro-environments including caves, tree hollows, rock crevices, and moist, humid leaf litter,

logs, and other ground debris.

### **Experience Level Required**

Novice/Beginner.

### **Size**

Death's head, or discoid cockroaches are large roaches that can reach up to 2 to 3 inches as adults.

### **Housing and Enclosure**

***Enclosure System: Primarily Terrestrial.*** Housing must be sealed and escape proof, as well as adequately ventilated. A secured, 5 to 10 gallon aquarium, terrarium or similar sized tub or container with an appropriate lid is recommended. Several of the acrylic displays and enclosures that are now manufactured for housing arachnids, insects, and other invertebrates can also be used. Three to four inches of orchard or coconut fiber substrate can then be used as acceptable substrates. In addition, furnishings for allowing these insects climbing and hiding opportunities should also be provided, and can include egg crates, cardboard tubes, or commercially available cork hides or cork bark. For water and hydration, misting at least once every few days is also recommended, or more frequently in areas of drier humidity. A small shallow dish of water can also be provided.

### **Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity**

Death's head cockroaches do not require any additional UVA/UVB lighting or heating, and should be maintained at around room temperature from 70 to 85, and up to 95 degrees F and 65 to 85% humidity levels. If supplemental lighting or heating is needed, a low wattage ceramic or radiant heat emitter, UTH (or under tank heating element), or incandescent bulb can be used. More specific lighting, heating, and humidity product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well. Spot clean the enclosure for wastes, feces, or uneaten food at least once per week. Be sure to periodically replace the substrate, clean, and disinfect the enclosure and its furnishings at minimum every 2 to 3 months. Humidity levels may vary somewhat depending on the species, although these tropical cockroaches should generally be kept at, or around 65 to 85% humidity.

### **Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition**

***Detritivorous to Omnivorous;*** Death's head, or discoid cockroaches are herbivorous to detritivorous, and will feed on a variety of fruit, vegetable, and other plant matter. Some of the foods that can be given every two to three days can include greens, carrots, romaine lettuce and other leafy greens, oranges, apples, squash, and other fruits and vegetables. Further calcium and vitamin D3 supplementation is not typically required, but can help with exoskeleton growth and development. More specific dietary and supplementary product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well.

### **Handling**

Death's head cockroaches are a large, slow moving, and docile species of cockroach that can be handled. Care should obviously be taken to not drop or otherwise injure them, however. Overall, death's head cockroaches are very hardy and easily maintained roach species to keep in captivity as pets or as feeders.

**\*\*Also be sure to practice basic cleanliness and hygiene associated with proper husbandry after touching or handling any animals or animal enclosures to prevent the possibility of contracting salmonellosis or any other zoonotic pathogens\*\***

## **Contact**

Authored by Eric Roscoe. For any additional questions, comments, and/or concerns regarding this animal, group of animals, or this care sheet, please email and contact:

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