**Kilgore Animal Control.*

Tarantulas-General *(Family Theraphosidae)*

Tarantulas, which typically belong to the family of large, hairy spiders known as Theraphosidae, are a very large and diverse group of arachnids, consisting of at least 1,040 recognized species in at least 166 different genera! Did you know that the name "Tarantula" first originated in Taranto, Italy to describe any "large and/or hairy spider? It was originally named after a species of wolf spider, Lycosa tarentula, which technically was not a tarantula.

Tarantulas are incredibly diverse in their lifestyles and natural history, using and producing silk as a means of aiding in their navigation, in their mating and reproduction, and for creating their own shelters or refuges. Unlike most true spiders, however, tarantulas do not actually build their own webs, among other differences which differentiate them from true spiders. Some species are burrowers or heavily fossorial, while some species are more arboreal or tree dwelling. Many species, particularly many of the New World species, also have a unique defense in which they will use their hind legs to kick irritating hairs located on their abdomens and hind legs known as "urticating hairs", which may cause irritation to any potential would-be predators.

Many species of tarantulas have become popular pets, due to their wide array of different sizes, colors, shapes, and other aspects. Some species make great beginner's pets, while others are only recommended for more advanced enthusiasts. In this guide, learn more about the general care of tarantulas, which species are best for each experience level, plus more!

Taxonomy

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities
Domain: Eukaryota
Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Arthropoda
Subphylum: Chelicerata
Class: Arachnida
Order: Araneae
Infraorder: Mygalomorphae

Family: Theraphosidae
**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Origin/History (Tarantulas in General)

Tarantulas became popular as exotic pets some-time during the mid 20th century, although their popularity would begin to take off the most during the 1970's and 1980's. This surge in popularity stemmed with a growing interest in keeping exotic pets in general, and the expanding availability of many of these animals due to international trade and improvements in animal care and husbandry techniques.

Species such as the Chilean rosehair (*Grammostola rosea),* Mexican red-knee (*Brachypelma smithi),* and Pinktoe tarantulas (*Avicularia avicularia*) became especially popular pet trade staples for a number of reasons, including their striking colors and appearances, docile and slow-moving nature, longevity compared to many other spiders, and relative low maintenance, requiring relatively little space. Many other species would have no specific history in the pet trade. The demand for many other pet tarantula species since then has grown steadily over the decades, as many more species would become bred in captivity, thereby reducing the demand for wild-collected specimens while providing enthusiasts a more sustainable way to keep tarantulas.

Lifespan and Longevity

Males of most tarantula species will often attain life spans of only 5 to 6 years. Females attain of most species considerably longer life spans of 15 to 20 years or more in captivity.

Housing and Enclosure

Enclosure System: Depends on the species. Most species of tarantulas generally do not require large enclosures or amounts of space, though. Provide a sturdy, secure, and escape proof terrarium or enclosure anywhere from 5 to 15 gallons in size with a secure top for a single adult spider. Several of the acrylic displays and enclosures that are now manufactured for housing arachnids, insects, and other invertebrates can also be used. Spiderlings can be housed in an appropriately sized spiderling vial, plastic container or deli cup with adequate holes for ventilation. Acceptable substrates for most to use can include pesticide free potting soil, coconut fiber, vermiculite, or similar substrates 3 to 4 inches in depth. Decorations and/or other cage furnishings can also be included as well, although floor space is more important than height. Also add branches, horizontal cork bark, and plants for refuge and hiding places. A fairly small, shallow water dish can also be provided, and should be cleaned regularly as well as regular misting for hydration.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity

Most species of tarantulas have simple and undemanding heating and lighting requirements in captivity, and do not require additional UVA/UVB lighting, although providing it can be greatly beneficial for your tarantula's health, immune system, and overall wellness. For most species, ambient temperatures between 70 to 80 degrees will work. For any supplemental heating that may be needed, use a low wattage incandescent or UVA/UVB bulb, radiant or ceramic heat emitter, or UTH (under tank heating element). 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. Humidity levels may also vary depending on the species, ranging from about 60 to 80%.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Insectivorous to Carnivorous; In the wild, all tarantulas are primarily insectivorous, meaning they eat insects and other invertebrates. Some species will also occasionally eat smaller vertebrates as well if they can catch and subdue them. In captivity, tarantulas can be fed a variety of appropriately sized feeder insects such as crickets, roaches, mealworms, superworms, and waxworms. Feeder insects should be gut-loaded in order to increase their optimal nutritional value. This will promote optimal exoskeleton growth and development. Any uneaten food items should be cleaned and removed after a day or two. Their feeding frequency will depend on the age, size, and overall health of your animal. Use care as to not overfeed even invertebrates, as obesity and other health related issues can still become an issue with them. 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

Handling depends on each species, and some species are more docile or easily handled than others. Any tarantula should handled carefully so as to avoid injuring the spider, as they are very fragile animals prone to injury. Accidently dropping a spider can result in the rupture of its internal organs and/or exoskeleton, causing death to your tarantula. Also be aware that some species may also kick urticating hairs from their abdomen and hind legs or "rear up" to display its fangs and front legs when upset or agitated. Although most tarantulas are not medically significant, with most being lesser than or just about equal to a bee sting, medical attention should still be sought from any apparent allergic reaction to a bite, or extreme irritation from urticating hairs from a pet tarantula.

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.

Good Beginner's Species-Generally slower moving, more docile, reluctant to bite. Good with handling.

-Costa Rican Zebra/Stripe-Kneed (Aphonopelma seemanni); New World Central America/Costa Rica. Terrestrial/Burrowing.
-Chilean Rosehair (Grammostola rosea); New World northern South America. Terrestrial/Burrowing.
-Mexican Red-Kneed (Brachypelma/Tliltocatl smithi); New World Mexico/Central America. Terrestrial/Burrowing.
-Pinktoe (Avicularia avicularia); New World northern South America. Arboreal.
-Antilles Pinktoe (Caribena versicolor); New World Caribbean. Arboreal.
-Brazilian Black (Grammostola pulchra); New World northern South America. Terrestrial/Burrowing.
-Curly Haired (Brachypelma/Tliltocatl albopilosum); New World Central America; Terrestrial.
-Texas Brown (Aphonopelma spp.); New World United States and Mexico. Terrestrial/Burrowing.
-Pink Zebra Beauty (Eupalaestrus campestratus); New World northern South America; Terrestrial/Burrowing.
-Haitian Brown (Phormictopus cancerides); New World northern South America. Terrestrial/Burrowing.
-Mexican Red-Rump (Brachypelma/Tliltocatl vagans); New World Mexico/Central America. Terrestrial.
-Chaco Goldknee (Grammostola pulchripes); New World northern South America; Terrestrial/Burrowing.

-Mexican Bloodleg (Aphonopelma bicoloratum); New World Central America. Terrestrial/Burrowing.
-Mexican Rose Gray (Brachypelma/Tliltocatl verdezi); New World Central America. Terrestrial/Burrowing.

More Intermediate Level Species-Species which can be faster moving, more skittish, have a somewhat more potent venom, and/or can be more easily agitated but generally not regarded as medically significant. Handling a bit more sketchy or dicey:

-Greenbottle Blue (Chromatophora cyaneopubescens); New World northern South America. Terrestrial/Burrowing.
-Bolivian Pink (Acanthoscurria chacoana); New World northern South America. Terrestrial/Burrowing.
-Tiger Rump (Cyclosternum/Davus fasciatus); New World Central America. Terrestrial/Burrowing.
-Brazilian Salmon Pink (Lasiodora parahybana); New World northern South America. Terrestrial/Burrowing.
-Cobalt Blue (Haplopelma/Cyriopagopus lividus); Old World southeastern Asia. Terrestrial/Burrowing.
-Horned Baboon (Ceratogyrus spp.); Old World southern Africa. Terrestrial/Burrowing.
-Featherleg Baboon (Stromatopelma calcaetum); Old World central and western Africa; Burrowing/Terrestrial.
-Skeleton-Knee (Ephebopus murinus); New World northern Central America. Terrestrial/Burrowing.

Advanced Species-Species which are even faster moving, more prone to react defensively, and/or have a potent more medically significant venom. Handling generally not recommended:

-Goliath Bird-Eating (Theraphosa blondi); New World northern South America; Terrestrial/Burrowing.
-Usambara Orange Baboon (Pterinochilus murinus); Old World sub-Saharan Africa; Terrestrial/Burrowing.
-Ornamentals/Gooty Sapphire (Poecilotheria spp.); Old World southeastern Asia. Arboreal.
-Malaysian Earthtiger (Cyriopagopus schioedtei); Old World southeastern Asia. Arboreal.

Contact

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