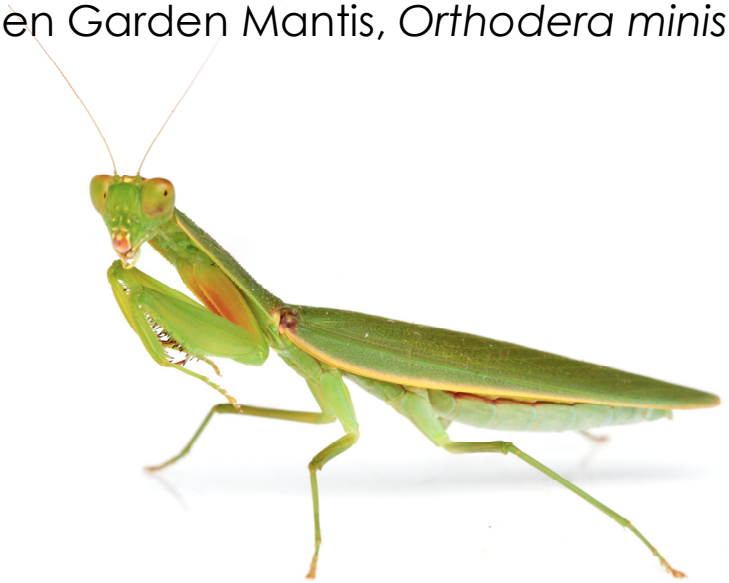
Care guide

Green Garden Mantis, *Orthodera ministralis*



Green Garden Mantids are widespread along Australia's east coast. As their name suggests, they are often found within suburban gardens, favouring green leafy plants and grasses that assist their camouflage. The females grow to around 40mm in body length, the males are a little smaller and more lightly built. They feed on a wide variety of other invertebrates such as grasshoppers, cicadas, crickets, cockroaches and spiders. They will sometimes take prey up to their own body size.

This species is generally green for its entire life span, however occasionally brown individuals are found. One distinctive feature is the width of the thorax view from above – almost the width of the head which differs from the thinner 'neck' of many other mantids. Another key feature is the blue 'eye' spots on the inner side of femur of the front raptorial legs. These spots are used to startle potential predators.

Like other mantids this species lays its eggs encased within a protective ootheca. The ootheca is around 10-15mm long, and is usually attached to a branch or some other solid surface. In the wild the young hatch several months later, and begin feeding soon after emerging. They will tolerate each other for a short time, but once they disperse any chance meetings of the siblings will often result in one eating the other.

These mantids grow by shedding their outer skeleton (exoskeleton). This process is called ecdysis or moulting. To moult successfully they need to hang uninterrupted beneath a leaf or branch. This can take 10mins to half an hour. Maturity has been reached once the mantids have developed wings. Males and females can be identified as they get larger; males have 7 segments in the abdomen (viewed from beneath), and females have 6.

Like many mantids, females of this species may consume the male during the mating process. Usually when this occurs, the male can still continue to copulate without much of the front half of his body. Although tis practice isn't as common in this species as it is in some other mantids, the males sacrifice serves to aid the development of the young he is fathering through the nourishing meal he is providing his partner.

Care guide

Food: Live or freshly dead insects. Crickets, cockroaches and flies are ideal. Dead insects must be fed to the mantid via forceps or tweezers, as they will not pick up dead insects off the ground. Insects ¼ to 1/3 of the mantids size are ideal and can be safely captured by the mantis.

Water: Mist spray around your mantis each day – it will drink the droplets.

Enclosure: The enclosure needs to be large enough to allow your mantid to shed its exoskeleton properly. An enclosure should be higher than it is wide, as mantids like to climb upwards. Add branches or sticks to the enclosure to give the mantis something to climb on. Place the enclosure in a spot where it gets a bit of daylight each day, but be careful it doesn't over heat in direct sunlight. Make sure there is plenty of ventilation in your enclosure.

Temperature and humidity: This species will do best at 22 – 28°C, but will tolerate 15 – 30°C. Cooler temperatures will result in a slower growth rate. Humidity is best maintained around 60-80% by misting inside the enclosure.

Life span: 6 -9 months.

Handling: These insects can be handled, but care must be taken when picking them up. They can be nervous at times, and want to jump off your hand. They should be picked up gently, by coaxing them onto your hand. They always prefer to climb up, so use this to your advantage when picking them up and putting them back into their enclosure. Females tend to be more easily handled than males; males can fly and are a little more nervous.

Reproduction: Adult males will mate with adult females all year round in captivity. Pairing them requires a large enough enclosure to allow the male to be introduced well away from the female so that he can make his own way towards her. Cramped conditions may lead to the female consuming the male before mating occurs. The female will produce an ootheca after mating, however this can take anywhere from a week to several weeks. Unmated females may also produce an ootheca, but it will not hatch. Fertile oothecae can take as little as two months to hatch, however, incubation periods are dependent on temperature. A large number of nymphs usually emerge; they can number around 100. The nymphs can be left together for a while, but should be separated after a few weeks to avoid significant cannibalism.

Common issues: Sometimes mantids will not shed their exoskeleton properly. To avoid this, ensure that there is enough space for the mantis to do this, and that it has sufficient branches etc to hang from. Other causes can be that their environment it too dry, so ensure daily misting takes place. Food insects can also interrupt moulting, so remove them if they have not been eaten.

NOTE: These animals are captive bred, and should not be released into the wild.

For more information contact Minibeast Wildlife at info@minibeastwildlife.com.au