

## Care guide

### Darkling Beetles (Tenebrionidae)



Beetles are the largest group of invertebrates. They are an insect, with 6 legs and 3 body parts – head, thorax and abdomen. Many beetles are able to fly, though some have wings but cannot fly. Beetles' wings are protected with a hard outer covering called elytra. These elytra will open up and the wings will fan out when the beetles take off in flight.

Darkling Beetles are able to fly, but do so rarely and mostly at night. They are a ground dwelling species that like to shelter during the day in leaf litter or soil. These beetles are omnivores and will feed on almost anything, but particularly like to chew on vegetables. This particular species is found in eastern Victoria.

Darkling Beetles reproduce all year round, and lay small eggs in the substrate. These eggs will hatch out into small yellow grubs, called larvae. The grubs feed on the substrate and on vegetables buried in the soil. They remain predominantly under the substrate, but will occasionally come to the surface to feed or to shelter under bark. They moult their hard exoskeleton to grow, and when large enough will pupate into an adult beetle.

Both the adult beetles and the larvae can be handled safely, but ensure they do not fall off your hand onto the ground. To handle the larvae, gently dig through the soil until you find them, and carefully pick them up. The beetles can be picked up easily with your fingers.

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**Food:** Freshly cut vegetables such as carrot, potato or sweet potato. This should be partially buried in the substrate so the larvae can also feed on it. Replace when it is all eaten. Adults and larvae will feed on Minibeast Wildlife's Darkling Beetle Food and even small amounts of breakfast cereals such as Wheat Bix.

**Water:** Mist spray the substrate once a day. This will keep the enclosure damp, and the beetles and larvae will drink from the moisture in the ground.

**Enclosure:** The enclosure needs to be about 10 cm H x 20 cm W x 20 cm L. Place the enclosure in a spot exposed to some daylight each day, but be careful it does not over heat or dry out in direct sunlight. The base of the enclosure should be covered in a substrate of either coco-peat (available from garden supply shops) or sand to a depth of 5cm. One end of this substrate always needs to be kept damp. Place a plastic container or piece of bark in the enclosure for the beetles and larvae to shelter under.

**Life span:** About 1 year.

**Handling:** These beetles cannot bite and can be handled safely. They should be picked up gently by their bodies, and carefully placed on the hand. The larvae can also be picked up and placed on your hand. Always wash your hands after handling these animals.

**Reproduction:** These beetles will mate all year round, and will pair up, with the smaller male mounting the female. Eggs will be laid in the substrate, and the hatchlings will be yellow, grub-like larvae. These larvae move through the substrate, feeding on organic matter and the vegetables you provide. They will pupate in the soil and emerge as adult beetles.

**Common issues:** Keeping these beetles in groups means that there are varying aged beetles, so deaths are not uncommon. Simply remove any dead beetles and dispose of them outside to be broken down naturally.

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