

Care guide

Net-casting Spider, *Deinopis subrufa*



Net-casting Spiders found in forested areas along the east coast of Australia. They are so named due to their unique hunting strategy. At night they construct an extremely elastic silken net, a process which they must do prior to each hunting session. Once the net is built they situate themselves above or beside a likely travel zone for crawling insects. This may be above the surface of a leaf, beside a plant stem or tree trunk or even above a section of the ground. The spider holds the net between its front four legs; each leg holding a corner. The net at this stage is relaxed and not held taut. The spider then focusses on the target area and becomes motionless. Net-casting spiders will sit motionless for hours, or the entire night if prey doesn't appear.

Deinopis species have eight eyes like most spiders, but have two enormous eyes facing forward. These eyes provide the spiders with excellent vision and the ability to accurately judge distance in order to strike their prey with the net. When prey comes within the target zone the spider rapidly lunge forward simultaneously stretching out the net to its full size. As the net makes contact with the prey the spider allows it to contract thus engulfing and tangling the victim.

Once captured the spider usually takes a short break then begins wrapping the prey with silk using its hind legs. Once the prey is immobilised the spider bites it allowing the venom to take effect before feeding.

This species lays its eggs encased within a tightly woven silken egg sac. The sac is round and brown in colour and has a very tough exterior. The female opens the sac after about 30 days of incubation. The sac can contain 50 -100 spiderlings, which will cluster around the egg sac for several days before they disperse.

These spiders grow by shedding their outer skeleton (exoskeleton). This process is called ecdysis or moulting. To moult successfully they need to hang uninterrupted from their web. Their colour darkens and they stop feeding a few days before moulting, and once they begin to moult they usually complete the process in about 10 minutes. They usually will not feed for about 24 hours after moulting. Males and females can be identified as they mature; males are about the same size as females, but are more slender and have black stripes down their back. They also have enlarged bulbs on the ends of their pedipalps (feelers) which females lack.

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Food: Live crawling insects; crickets are ideal. The food insects are best around 1/3 the size of your spider. Spiders will ignore food if they judge it to be too big to tackle. The spider will only feed when it has a net, and live insects should be introduced carefully to avoid scaring the spider and causing damage to the net. Remove any uneaten live food if the spider is not hunting to avoid the insect harassing the spider.

Water: Mist spray lightly around your spider every second day – it will drink the droplets if it requires water. This is best done during the day when the spider is not hunting.

Enclosure: These spiders do well within mesh enclosures, as it allows enough space for the spider to hunt and it can easily climb the surfaces. A suitable enclosure for an adult would be around 30cx30cmx30cm. Minibeast Wildlife's [small pop-up mesh enclosures](#) are ideal.

Temperature: The safe temperature zone for this species is 18° – 26°C, but will tolerate 8°– 30° for limited periods.

Life span: Around a year.

Handling: These spiders can be handled gently. They are mildly venomous, but not aggressive and are reluctant to bite. When handled they are most likely to drop to the ground quickly and attempt to run away, however these spiders are clumsy on the ground and should be easy to catch again.

Reproduction: Feed the female well before pairing, although cannibalism is rare in this species. Release a male within the females enclosure well away from her. Observe them regularly – they may need to be kept together for several days to ensure the male has had a chance to mate.

Common issues: These spiders will discard their net if significantly disturbed – take care to minimise disruption to the spider's hunting position when introducing food insects.