

Care guide

Golden Orb-weaver, *Nephila pilipes*



Golden Orb-weavers (*Nephila pilipes*) are large spectacular spiders from Australia's tropical north. Three species are present in Australia, *N. pilipes* is by far the largest. This species builds expansive orb-webs which can be up to a meter across. The guidelines that anchor the web may be short when the web is built in a confined space or extremely long. Web anchors have been recorded by Minibeast Wildlife spanning six metres. The webs themselves are extremely strong and capable of catching very large insects and on occasions, small birds and bats. The silk used in the web is sticky and has a golden sheen. These spiders sit in the web day and night, repairing it when damaged and rebuilding it as required.

This species lays its eggs underground encased within a pale-yellow woolly silk sac. This behaviour is quite unusual for orb-weaving spiders. The female will leave the web when ready to lay and find a suitable place to bury the egg sac, usually only a centimetre or two below the surface. The egg sac can contain hundreds of eggs. The young emerge 30 - 60 days after being laid (they will develop faster in warmer conditions). The spiderlings will leave the sac and cluster together on a nearby object usually for a day or so before they disperse. Despite the large size of the adults, hatching Golden Orb-weavers are tiny – about a millimetre in body length.

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 easily as they mature; males are tiny and mature at around 7mm long in body length. They are usually red in colour and have enlarged bulbs on the ends of their pedipalps (feelers) which females lack.

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Food: Live insects. Crickets, cockroaches, moths and flies are ideal. The food insects should be no larger than 1/3 of the size of your spider. As this is a web-building spider, prey is best offered by being trapped in the spider's web. Feeding twice a week is recommended, but young spiders will feed more often when they are growing.

Water: Mist spray lightly around your spider every second day – it will drink the droplets from the web.

Enclosure: These spiders do well within mesh enclosures, as it allows enough space for the spider to construct the web without allowing the spider to wander away. A suitable enclosure would be no smaller than 60cm x 30cm x 30cm for juveniles and larger for adults. These spiders can also be encouraged to set up a web in an 'orb-frame' – a free standing frame within branches protruding from a base. For more information, refer to "Bugs Alive – A Guide to keeping Australian invertebrates". To set the spider up in this frame, let the spider attach its silk to one branch, then slowly guide her (on your hand or a stick) to the opposing branch to attach a line of silk between the two branches.

Temperature: The safe temperature zone for this species is 20° – 28°C, but will tolerate 8°– 30° for limited periods.

Humidity: This is tropical species - high humidity is required. 65 – 85% is recommended.

Life span: 1-2 years.

Handling: These spiders can be handled gently if required, however handling unnecessarily is not recommended. They are mildly venomous, but are 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.

Common issues: If kept in the open, these spiders may wander when exposed to drafts (by releasing silk drift lines) and may end up with webs in unexpected positions. They may not build a web if space is too limited or temperature or humidity is too low.

For more information contact Minibeast Wildlife at
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