

Care guide

Australian Tarantulas (Theraphosidae)



Australian tarantulas are a primitive group of spiders belonging to the family Theraphosidae. Unlike the colourful representatives of this group in other areas of the world, Australian species are generally variations of brown in colour. They are found in the warmer regions of the country; within the arid zones and in the tropics. They are terrestrial and most species either burrow or make their silken retreats beneath rocks, logs or other objects on the ground. They feed on a wide range of other invertebrates including crickets, cockroaches and other spiders. They have also been known to feed on small vertebrates such as frogs and geckos in the wild.

These spiders are ambush hunters that sit and wait for their food to approach them. They detect their prey through vibration both through the air and via the ground (and through their silk lines), and have relatively poor eyesight. They attack with burst of speed and impale their prey with their large fangs. They then drag it back into their retreat to consume it

Mature males will leave the burrow or retreat in order to breed, wandering by night in search of females. Males are the sex most often encountered by people due to this seasonal wandering. Once mated, females will construct a silk wrapped egg sac within the burrow, and guard it until hatching. They are capable of having hundreds of offspring, and can breed annually once mature.

These spiders grow by shedding their outer skeleton (exoskeleton). This process is called ecdysis or moulting. Their colour darkens and they usually stop feeding for a week or more before moulting. Moulting usually takes place within the burrow or retreat whilst lying on their back. Once they begin to moult the process is usually complete in about 30 minutes. They usually will not feed for several days after moulting. Males and females can be identified as they mature; males have enlarged bulbs on the ends of their pedipalps (feelers) which females lack, and males tend to have thin bodies and longer legs. Mature males will not moul again, and have relatively short life spans compared to the females. Mature females will moul annually for many years.

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Food: Live insects. Crickets and cockroaches are ideal. Insects 1/3 of the size of your spider are an ideal size. Feeding once or twice a week is recommended, but young spiders will feed more often when they are growing. Remove live insects from your enclosure if your spider is not hungry.

Water: You can offer your spider a moist sponge within a dish (such as a bottle top) for water, however, if the substrate is kept moist the spider will rarely require additional water.

Enclosure: Despite their size, tarantulas do not require large enclosures. An adult can be housed comfortably in an enclosure with a floor space of 30cm x 30cm. Enclosures need to be secure, with secure lids. Glass or acrylic terrariums are ideal, and plastic storage tubs are also suitable. Ventilation is important, and any mesh used should be aluminium, as adult spiders can easily tear through fibreglass fly mesh.

Coco-peat is an ideal substrate, and ideally should have a moisture gradient (a dry end and moist end to the enclosure). This should be deep enough to allow your spider to create a retreat (several centimetres). Additional objects (bark etc) may be added to allow your spider to construct a retreat beneath them.

Temperature: These spiders will be most active at temperatures of 22 – 26°C, but will tolerate 10 – 20°C seasonally. They can tolerate temperatures below 10°C for brief periods.

Humidity: To prevent dehydration, these spiders require relatively high humidity (60-80%). This can be maintained by keeping the substrate moist. Arid zone species (*Selenotholus* and *Selenotypus* spp.) require less moisture/lower humidity, coastal and rainforest species (*Phlogius* spp.) require more.

Life span: 5-15 years.

Handling: Direct handling is not recommended. Adults are heavy and a fall can easily injure them or kill them. Although these spiders are not dangerously venomous, adults do have large fangs and could give a painful bite. If you need to transfer them, they can be easily guided into a jar or plastic container.

Common issues: These spiders can climb quite well, and juveniles in particular can easily climb glass and escape through small gaps. Ensure enclosures are secure to avoid escape.

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