



CARE GUIDE



TIGER LEECH

Richardsonianus australis



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PROFILE

Tiger Leeches are found in Victoria and New South Wales within Australia. They occur in a wide variety of fresh water habitats, but prefer slow moving or stagnant water bodies.

These leeches are predators, scavengers or blood feeders that feed on a variety of invertebrate species or the blood of vertebrates. They will latch on to a prey item, make a small three-pronged star-shaped incision, and suck the blood from their prey. They usually do not kill their prey, but drop off once they have eaten their fill.

They are perfectly adapted to live under water with streamlined bodies. They still need to surface for air, and will come to the surface to take in oxygen, which they do through the cellular walls of their body.

These leeches are used for medicinal purposes by doctors worldwide. They are an excellent way to stimulate blood flow to areas after micro-surgery and skin grafts.

To reproduce, Tiger leeches deposit cocoons that develop a hard surface in order to protect the enclosed eggs. Eggs are small, embedded into a protein fluid but not with a yolk. Some may even deposit cocoons in terrestrial habitats which reduces the risk of the offspring being harmed by aquatic predators such as snails, insect larvae and fish.

FOOD

These leeches do not have to be fed too often. Sometimes, one meal can last them for 12 months. However, to feed them, simply place a leech on your hand. If the leech is hungry, it will latch its mouth onto your hand, usually between the fingers. You may feel a slight sting, but this quickly fades as the leech injects an anti-coagulant which keeps the blood flowing. After the leech has fed long enough, it will drop off and the star shaped incision left behind will keep bleeding for around half an hour, so have plenty of bandaids on hand! It may take from 10 minutes to half an hour for a leech to feed.

ENCLOSURE

A fish tank 30cm long and 20cm deep would be the minimum requirement for these leeches. The tanks should include some aquatic vegetation of logs and rocks for the leeches to cling to while not swimming. Make sure that there is a tight-fitting lid on the tank as these leeches are great escape artists and will take every opportunity to climb out.

WATER CONDITIONS

Fresh non-chlorinated water. The safe zone is 15° - 25°C, although the leeches will tolerate temperatures higher and lower than this. The water should be changed at least once a week if it is not filtered, and more often if the water looks cloudy or murky.

TEMPERATURE

This species will do best at 15° – 25°C, but will tolerate 18 – 24°C and have a slower growth rate. The cooler the temperature, the less often the leech will require feeding.

CLEANING AND MAINTENANCE

Keep the tank clean and change the water at least once a week if it is not filtered, more often if the water looks cloudy or murky.

HANDLING

Leeches are best handled using a fine-meshed aquarium net. They can be handled gently with hands while they are being fed.

COMMON ISSUES

Despite their requirement for water, these leeches will leave water and can easily escape from a tank if not secure. If a leech does escape, it can dry out very quickly. Make sure leeches are housed within a secure enclosure, and if they escape return them to the water as quickly as possible.

Note: It is not known whether leeches transmit blood related diseases, so it is wise to have only one person feeding them.



1-2 years life span



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

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