



Housing and Feeding Invertebrate Prey

Garbage in, garbage in

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This is a quick overview on the feeding and keeping of invertebrate prey. Why feed them, you ask? Most prey are not fed or watered properly during the transition from prey breeder to your house. If you bought them at a pet store, they may not have been fed nutritious food.

Your animals are what they eat. If you feed them starving prey, or prey that are malnourished, your reptiles and amphibians will end up malnourished as well. Feed your prey well and you increase your chance of raising healthy animals.

Crickets

Food:

Tropical Fish Flakes

Ground monkey chow with calcium powder

High protein baby salad flakes mixed with reptile vitamins

Iguana salad: mix fresh vegetables (green beans, orange squash, parsnips), fruit (cantaloupe, apples, pears) and alfalfa pellets with reptile multivitamin and calcium supplements; let sit in refrigerator for at least 24 hours to break down pellets. This provides plant-based proteins and a hefty dose of calcium.)

Water:

Sponge soaked in water set in a jar lid

Slices of potato, fruit, vegetables

Shallow bowl of water with gravel or rocks in it so that the crickets can climb up on them to hop out so they don't drown

Housing:

Covered aquarium or other top-opening enclosure. Furnish with sections of egg carton or cores from toilet paper rolls or paper towel rolls. Designate one side of enclosure the food/water area. Make sure screen is small enough to prevent escape of smallest crickets or that it is tall enough so that they cannot climb to the screen and out. To serve, pull out a section of crate or roll and quickly shake it into the lizard or amphibian enclosure.

To transfer bulk-buy crickets from breeder's shipping box into housing: Slice the box open and put the whole thing in a large plastic garbage bag. Open the box, take out the egg crate layers and shake them free of crickets one at a time; remove each one when done. Shake the box free of crickets once the egg crate is out. Feed the opening of the bag into the opened trap door. Carefully slide the crickets forward to the neck of the

bag, and begin shaking them into the tank. Once the bag is empty, remove it carefully to shake off any clinging crickets, and voila! All crickets transferred without escape!

Housekeeping:

Clean out the enclosure thoroughly once a month at least: remove all sheds and carcasses; put in fresh cardboard rolls/egg carton, throw away left over food and fruit. Wash with hot soapy water, removing all bits of cricket feces. Let air dry.

Mealworms (*Tenebrio*)

Food/Bedding:

Fresh bran mixed with high protein baby cereal, alfalfa flakes (or crushed alfalfa hay), chicken egg layer mash

Mix in reptile multivitamin and calcium supplements

Water

Slices of fruit or vegetables

Housing:

To keep from metamorphosing into pupae and beetles, keep in the refrigerator. You can keep in the original container, replacing the fruit daily and bran/vitamins as needed.

To promote metamorphosis, you need to keep them at room temperature and house in a larger container. Buy a larger than usual batch of meal worms (you can get right from breeder at far less expense than buying from pet store), then, instead of refrigerating them, leave them out a room temperature. Put in a plastic or glass covered enclosure (like a small critter tank or Pet Pal), adding extra bran, some slices of fruit. Cover with a couple of layers of paper towel or cloth, and keep it moist (not wet). They will crowd under and go through their metamorphosis, from larva to pupae (which may also be eaten) to beetle within a matter of days. Leave some beetles in to breed to get more larvae.

Housekeeping:

Sift out the worms, pupae and larvae monthly and replace the food/bedding and fruit. Replace the paper towel as needed or replace cloth with freshly laundered one.

King Worms (*Zoophoba*)

Food/Bedding:

Alfalfa pellets mixed with chicken egg layer pellets, crumble or mash; bird seed cockatiel mix or similar) may be added in.

Water:

Slices of fruit or vegetables such as apples, potatoes

Sponge soaked in water placed on a shallow jar lid (keep moisture off the food as much as possible to prevent spoiling.

Housing:

These are very capable and agile worms and can climb surprisingly smooth and tall surfaces. Keep in deep bin or bowl half filled with the food/bedding. Place the fruit or soaked sponge on top. A few layers of paper towels or paper will be used to congregate under, making it easier to dig them out. Keep at room temperature - takes 10 months or so to metamorphose. The pupae are large, commensurate with the size of the larvae; the black beetles are surprisingly slender and delicate.

Reproduction:

Put one worm each in a film canister. After about two weeks most pupate into the beetles, some take longer. Put all the beetles into a 10 gallon aquarium with a bran bedding and a very porous piece of wood. They mate and lay there eggs in the wood. It seems to take a long time, 1-2 months, for the eggs to hatch and to notice the small worms.

Housekeeping:

Sift out the larvae, pupae and beetles. Pour out the old food/bedding into a storage container and replace with fresh. Add some more food and sliced vegetable to the old food/bedding, and check couple of weeks for the next month or so for small larvae. If there are larvae hatched from eggs, they will be seen when sifting through the container.

A Note On Feeding Invertebrate Prey...

Know your reptile and amphibian. If they are not killing the prey before eating it (such as by vigorous chewing along the length of the prey or crushing it against the ground or furnishings) then you may need to do some disabling yourself. It is important to note that dinner can become the diner if the animal being fed is weakened or does not finish what is offered to it.

Feeding several smaller prey items is more nutritious and healthier than feeding fewer larger prey items. Smaller prey are more efficiently digested and are more nutritious in that they contain proportionately less exoskeleton - that indigestible stuff that can clog up the gut. You may think you are getting a deal buying those large crickets, but you are actually getting less food value. There are also reports of transient paralysis and central nervous system damage when certain lizards, such as small bearded dragons, are fed worms or crickets that are too large.

Feed a variety of prey species - while a monodiet of rats or mice are fine for carnivores, insects aren't so well-rounded nutritionally speaking.

Always gut-load your prey before feeding them out. If you buy from the pet store or the breeder, feed with the proper nutrient loaded foods for at least 24 hour - longer is better - before offering them to your animals. This means you need to do a little planning ahead so you don't run out at the last minute.

If you leave worms or crickets in your herp's enclosure, you **MUST** leave appropriate food in there for them. If your herp is not hungry, it will not eat. It will also not fend of being eaten by a hungry or thirsty worm or cricket. Always place a small pile of cricket or worm food - the same stuff you've been feeding them for gut-loading, in one corner of the tank. Provide a way for them to get moisture, either by placing a piece of fruit or vegetable in there or a rock-filled dish or bowl of water that they can get in and out of. Also provide a place for them to congregate out of site.

Before you add more to the herp's enclosure, check the hiding place and get any hiding in there out and moving about.