



pets in the
classroom

CARE SHEET Hermit Crab

Most land hermit crabs in the United States for sale in pet stores are Caribbean hermit crabs (also commonly known as Purple Pinchers) *Coenobita clypeatus*. These land hermit crab species will range from 0.5 inches to 4 inches in length and hermit crabs are nocturnal. Some land hermit crabs can live up to 10 years. Hermit crabs communicate with one another by making croaking or chirping sounds by rubbing against their shell or rubbing their body parts together.



Hermit crabs' mate in the ocean. A female hermit crab carries fertilized eggs attached to her abdomen until they hatch. Hermit crab larvae are aquatic and go through several developmental stages in water before making a permanent transition to land.

HOUSING

Your Pet's Home

When choosing a home for your hermit crab you have to consider your pet's requirements. Habitats have to provide ample space for them to move about along with the necessary décor for climbing and hiding areas. You have to consider things like normal maintenance and cleaning, making sure the habitat is easy to clean and sanitize.

The Habitat

Land hermit crabs are best kept in a large, dry tank such as a terrarium or an aquarium with sand or coconut fiber as the substrate with plenty of climbing accessories. The habitat should simulate the crab's natural habitat as much as possible and each hermit crab should have a gallon of space

For most hermit crabs, 3 to 4 inches of substrate should be enough so the hermit crabs can burrow, which they like to do especially during times of molt when crabs must leave their shells. Add branches, rocks, or other items as desired, a ceramic food dish and two shallow ceramic bowls, one for freshwater and one for saltwater. Metal dishes should be avoided, as hermit crabs are extremely sensitive to metal. There should be a hiding place for each crab. Keep only crabs of similar size together, as larger crabs may dominate smaller crabs. Use a ventilated top is recommended.

Developed with and approved by qualified veterinarians
Reviewed by Petco's Animal Care, Education and Compliance (ACE) Team



ENVIRONMENT

Lighting & Heating

It is critical to keep land hermit crabs warm as they are tropical and will die if exposed to temperatures below 50° F. Land crabs are most active at temperatures between 72° F and 81° F. Temperatures below 65° F activity will diminish greatly. If the hermit crab seems lethargic or stops moving, check the temperature. You can use a heat lamp, under-tank heater, heating mat or a heating pad that sticks to the side of the tank. Place the heating element on one side of the habitat in case the crabs become too hot and need a cooler place to go to.

Humidity

Maintaining a humidity level between 70% and 90% is important. Hermit crabs breathe through modified gills, as opposed to lungs, the air they intake must be moist which means they need humid air to breathe, otherwise it will result in dried out gills, suffocating your hermit crabs. To help keep their enclosure moist and humid, mist the habitat daily. Be careful not to saturate the enclosure and always use dechlorinated water.

Substrate

The terrarium should mimic the crab's natural habitat as much as possible. Use calcium carbonate sand and/or coconut fiber, covering the bottom of the habitat, provides the best substrate. The proper amount is three (3) times deeper than the height of your largest crab.

Water

Water is essential to the health of keeping hermit crabs successfully in captivity. Access to both freshwater and saltwater is important. Provide ceramic bowls that are about 2 inches deep with a ramp preferably that offers easy entry so the crabs can fully submerge themselves. Both freshwater and saltwater should always be available. To prepare saltwater for hermit crabs, you will need to add marine salt to a gallon of water. Always use a tap water conditioner to remove tap water chemical that can be harmful to your crabs.

Décor

Driftwood, branches, cholla wood, up-ended clay flowerpots and similar furnishings will add greatly to the hermit crabs' quality of life. Plenty of empty shells should always be available.



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CARE

Hermit crabs live in groups naturally, which is why it is important to have a tank-mate. Overcrowding and having too many crabs in a habitat can easily lead to aggression and death, so it is important to stick to the recommended stocking capacities.

Handling

It is best to interact with hermit crabs while sitting on the floor with a towel or pad underneath. Always handle hermit crabs with clean hands. Hermit crabs will become used to being handled the more you interact with them and pick them up. If your hermit crab pinches you, it is only because it is trying to hold on. Remember that hermit crabs use their pinchers to climb. Hermit crabs should be gradually desensitized to handling practices to limit stress and fear, as being carried is not a natural state for them. When picking up a crab that is not acquainted with you, hold the crab by the shell with one hand and place the other hand with palm tightly outstretched just below the crabs legs so that its legs are touching your outstretched hand. If the crab tries to grab onto your hand, all you need to do is to gently lift it up slightly. As your hermit crab becomes accustomed to you, they will feel much more secure and be less apt to try to grab onto your hand. Be aware that dangling a hermit crab in midair will cause it to try to grab onto you so that it feels secure.

Playtime

Hermit Crabs are gregarious and enjoy interaction with other hermit crabs. Once they are accustomed to you, try hand feeding them bits of fresh fruits and vegetables as well as meats.

Roommates

Hermit crabs are extremely social animals and, whenever possible, should have companions. When introducing a new crab to your hermit crabs, it is important to do it gradually. Keep them separated for about a week to allow the new crab time to adjust to his new surroundings. The best time to place them together is the daytime, after the main crab group has eaten so there is no food competition. If fighting occurs, remove the new crab and try again the next day. They will eventually get used to each other.

Diet

Hermit crabs are omnivorous scavengers and like variety in their diet. A good complete hermit crab food should be available in the habitat at all times. This will ensure that your crab has the proper vitamins and minerals that they need to survive. Supplement with fresh produce and protein. It is always a good idea to give them additional fresh items in their food dish. They will also benefit from a vitamin supplement.

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Water

Hermit crabs require both freshwater and saltwater water sources to survive. Saltwater should be made using commercial sea salt sold for marine fish and crustaceans.

Molting

Whenever your hermit crab is molting, you should place him in another small tank, set up similar to the main habitat. Land hermit crabs are soft and defenseless after molting and can be eaten by their tank mates. Check daily for signs of an impending molt such as digging, remaining below ground and lethargy are typical signs your crab is molting. At the time of molting, a hermit crab needs a source of calcium to assist in the hardening of the new exoskeleton. Commercial supplements or a few pieces of eggshell placed in the terrarium will usually meet this need. As the crab grows, it will need to move into a larger shell. Several shells of different sizes should be in the terrarium so the crab can change homes as necessary. Any of the spiral gastropod shells are acceptable, but some types of shells have more interior room than others. Keep in mind the crab will grow but its shell will not. It is a good practice to keep several shells of various sizes in the terrarium for the crab to move freely in and out of; sometimes hermit crabs will reject unsatisfactory shells if they have cracks or holes. This could be because the crab keeps a small amount of water in its shell to keep its gills moist, and if it leaks, the crab could die. Crabs may also reject shells that contain sand or other materials. Depending on their size, hermit crabs can take days to weeks to molt.

Remaining Out of Its Shell

This is often a sign of stress. Try to determine what is causing it. One common cause is high temperatures. Is the habitat in direct sunlight? Look for unsanitary conditions and check the shells to see if they are damaged. Place the crab and its shell in a clean, soap-free glass, bowl, or cup that is just large enough to contain the crab and shell. In such proximity, the crab may enter the shell.

Bio Safety

Wash your hands with soap and water before and after handling any organism as well as after cleaning its habitat.



COMMON HERMIT CRAB HEALTH ISSUES

Health Issues	Symptoms or Causes	Recommendations
Mites	Small black mites appear in the habitat or directly on the hermit crab	Place infested crab into quarantine tank and perform deep cleaning with bleach solutions
Dry skin	Lack of humidity/water in the tank	Mist habitat and refresh both freshwater and saltwater bowls
Loss of limbs	Loss of limbs can be caused by fighting with another hermit crab, poor habitat cleanliness, lack of humidity, incorrect temperature, improper rinsing of tank-residual chemicals or chlorine	Adhere to daily/weekly/monthly maintenance schedule. Don't overcrowd
Lethargy (lack of movement)	Not moving around the tank	Confirm habitat temperature and humidity are at recommended levels
Foul odors	Rotting food, sick/dying hermit crab, unsatisfactory habitat maintenance	Perform deep cleaning with bleach solution



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Daily

- Remove waste daily, using a sand scooper to filter out debris or wet clumps of sand.
- Empty and clean water dish. Refill with fresh dechlorinated water.

Weekly

- Depending on the number of hermit crabs being kept or foul smell coming from their tank mostly due to rotten uneaten food or their feces, clean the habitat more thoroughly. Hermit crabs should be moved to a separate location during cleaning.
- Wipe and clean the tank walls and accessories with hot soapy water and rinse completely, allowing to air dry.
- Replace substrate at this time.

Monthly

- Deep cleaning is necessary monthly, sterilizing accessories and their food and water bowls as well. During the “deep clean” hermit crabs should be moved to a separate location, and the cage components washed with hot soapy water or dilute bleach (approximately 1:30 bleach to water ratio) and then rinsed and air dried.

HELPFUL LINKS

Hermit Crab Water Conditioner:

<https://zoomed.com/hermit-crab-drinking-water-conditioner/>

Hermit Crab Mineral Block:

<https://www.petco.com/shop/en/petcostore/product/zoo-med-hermit-crab-mineral-blocks-1525409>

Hermit Crab Under Tank Heater:

<https://www.petco.com/shop/en/petcostore/product/zoo-med-hermit-crab-heater-946427>

Hermit Crab Food:

https://www.hikari.info/tropical/t_12.html

<https://zoomed.com/hermit-crab-food/>

<https://www.petco.com/shop/en/petcostore/product/zoo-med-hermit-crab-fruit-salad-all-natural-fruit-treat-989401>

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CARE SHEET **Hermit Crab**

Hermit Crab Sand Substrate:

<https://flukerfarms.com/hermit-crab-sand-substrate/>

<https://zoomed.com/hermit-soil-2/>

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