



**P & K Pets
Info Sheet #07**

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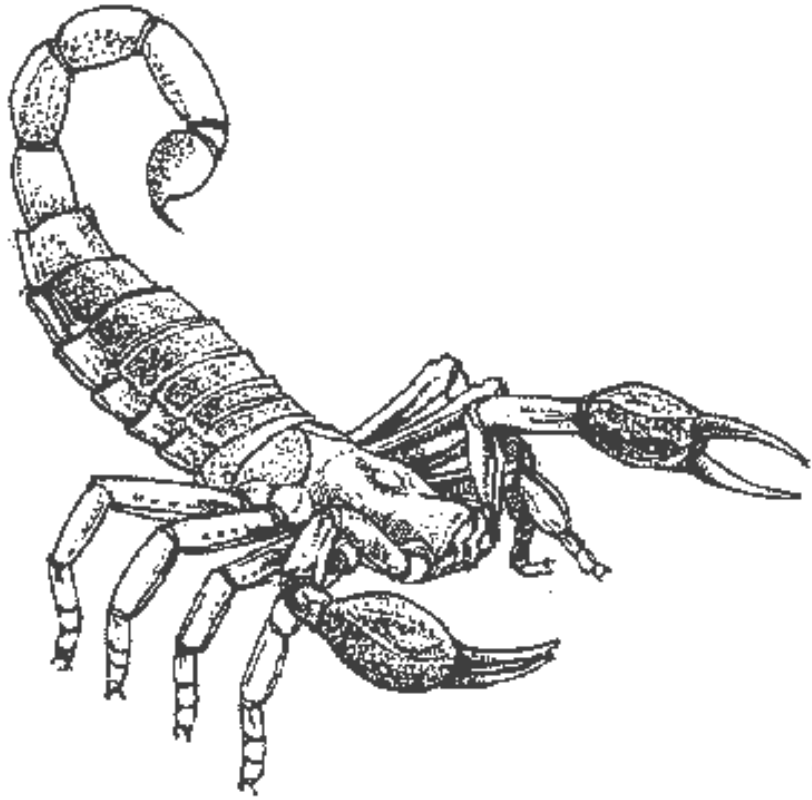
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SCORPION

CARE



INFORMATION



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INTRODUCTION

Scorpions are fascinating and ancient creatures which, regardless of their country of origin all share the same morphology (*look the same*) with the now famous curled up stinging tail and large front claws.

All scorpions contain a sting in their tail and the strength of the venom varies incredibly between species. The ones kept as pets tend to have the weakest stings and it can be compared to something like a wasp sting or hornet sting - still not something you want to be stung by! There are a few scorpions such as the Australian *Androctonus australis* which can prove fatal and should be avoided at all costs. If you intend keeping scorpions as pets make sure they are the safe ones.



There are around 1400 - 1500 hundred known species of carnivorous scorpions in the world, mostly they come from desert regions and tropical rainforests but they are also found in cooler climates including the UK. There are over 30 species in Australia.

Scorpions are often referred to as insects, this is not actually the case. In reality all scorpions belong to a group of mostly terrestrial (*land living*) creatures officially classified as Arachnida (*sub group Scorpiones*). The Arachnid group also contains the order Araneae (*spiders*), Uropygi (*whip scorpions*), Amblypygi (*tailless whip scorpions*) and Solifugae (*sun spiders*) as well as one or two other orders which are less kept by the hobbyist.

Scorpions in the wild are very resilient and can go without food and water for months on end seemingly without any detriment. When kept as pets though they should have ample food available for their requirements otherwise they may start to eat each other, they can be kept in small groups of up to 4 providing they have ample food, floor space and hiding places.



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HOUSING

The easiest way to house your scorpion is in an aquarium of around 18 inches long x 12 inches wide and 15 inches high, the size is not critical but shouldn't be too small. They also like to burrow in to the ground especially under a rock or piece of wood so you must provide a suitable substrate for this. A good mix for the bottom of the tank would consist of 70% sphagnum peat, 20% potting sand and 10% fine grade orchid bark. An alternative to the above substrate is vermiculite on it's own, this has the advantage of being sterile so it won't contain mites and won't allow them to thrive. Whichever substrate you choose it should be added to a depth of 3 to 4 inches with a couple of pieces of cork bark, a large(ish) piece of slate or something similar added to the surface. The scorpion will burrow under this and use it as a hiding place. The substrate should be slightly damp but not wet when you add it to the tank. The substrate in the base of the tank should be replaced with fresh material every 3 to 4 months.

TROPICAL SCORPIONS (Northern Australia/OLD)

In their natural environment the temperature rarely drops below 20°C by day or night so you will need to reproduce this in your tank. The simplest method is to use one of the under tank heating mats with a thermostat fitted. The heating mat should be placed under 1/2 to 3/4 of the tank (*at the opposite end to the hiding place*) so that there is a cooler area available if the scorpion wants it. The temperature in the tank needs is in the range of 20°C to 25°C at soil level so place the thermostat control about an inch above the substrate.

The jungle type scorpions require a humidity level higher than desert types. A simple light spray (*mist*) with a hand sprayer over the substrate twice a day with clean, fresh water will be required. In addition you can place a pad of wet cotton wool under the substrate in one corner above the heating mat, re wet this pad frequently and the rising heat will help maintain the humidity. If using vermiculite on its own then you can add 1/4 pint every week, do this by pouring it in to one of the corners and the vermiculite will draw it evenly through itself.



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DESERT SCORPIONS (Southern Australia/SA &WA)

Despite their radically different homes, most of the commonly kept scorpions have much the same requirements for housing, only the humidity level changes. Use the same basic set up as described above but omit the pad of cotton wool and lightly spray the tank just once a day rather than two if yours is a desert species.

FEEDING

Most scorpions will eat almost all small cricket sized insects but anything that stings or bites should not be introduced - there's no point risking your pets. Crickets, mealworm, grasshoppers, stick insects, some cockroaches etc all make good scorpion prey. One vital element is that the insects should be introduced to the tank alive, scorpions will not eat dead insects. If possible you should vary their diet and not feed the same single food source all the time, this will help them develop fully and provide all the minerals, vitamins and fats for good growth.

Drinking water should be provided in either a shallow dish of 1/2 inch or alternatively a 2 inch deep dish filled with well wetted cotton wool, or pebbles can be used.

GROWTH

Scorpions achieve growth in two major ways. Increase in body mass over time with ingestion of food brings about a small size increase as flexible membranes stretch. This method of growth has limitations due to the scorpions hardened(non-living) exoskeleton or cuticle. Expansion only occurs between the hardened sections where flexible membranes exist to allow movement and expansion of the main mesosoma(body).





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The mesosoma must expand to allow for the development of embryo's in females and also to allow expansion as food is ingested. This expansion comes about via the flexible pleural membranes, found between the top and bottom mesosomal plates. The remaining flexible membranes between sections is to allow for the articulated movement of the various body parts.

The second and most interesting method of growth comes about by shedding or ecdysis of the cuticle. To achieve major growth the scorpion must grow a new cuticle under the old, which will expand and help push the old cuticle off the body.

BREEDING

Scorpions will not breed unless they have a 'stage' on which to dance. The mating dance begins by the two scorpions locking their claws and walking forwards and backwards together, they may turn as they are doing this. The stage should be as flat as possible and a good idea is to use a piece of slate on the surface (*see housing*), this should be large enough so that the pair don't drop off it as this will upset their mating.

The dance can continue from a few minutes to several hours or even days, at a suitable time the male will deposit a packet of sperm on to the surface of the slate stage, this is called a spermatophore. The female will then position her body over the sperm sack and collect it with her cloacae (*genital opening*). Once the female has collected the sperm the dance will end and the female is now pregnant!

After a successful mating the female should be placed in her own tank after 2 - 3 months, but before she gives birth. If she gets stressed she may eat the young as they emerge. Gestation varies between species but typically for the large scorpions it can be 5 to 9 months before she will give birth to miniature scorpions. Once they emerge from her fat body they will climb on to her back and remain there for 1 - 2 weeks, as soon as they climb down they should be separated from the mother or she may consider them a meal!

