



**P & K Pets
Info Sheet #21**

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CENTIPEDE

CARE



INFORMATION



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INTRODUCTION

Centipedes are not actually insects, they are “Myriopods”. Despite their name, they don’t actually have 100 legs, and the amount of legs they have vary depending on the species. Centipedes are fast moving carnivores, and are very different from millipedes. However, the two are often classed together. They have a hard exoskeleton and jointed legs. They live on land in moist microhabitats and hide under rocks and leaf litter. Quite often, turning over a large rock will reveal a centipede. One centipede’s commonly found in the suburbs is the house centipede, (*Scutigera forceps*) which is about 2 inches (5 cm) long and has 15 pairs of legs. Some centipedes (*Geophilus electricus*) glow in the dark.



Centipedes have a flattened, segmented body, long antennae, and many legs (each leg is slightly longer than the one in front of it). Centipedes have from 15 to about 177 segments (but most have about 15). Each body segment has a pair of legs that stick out from the sides. A member of the genus *geophilus* has 177 pairs of legs. When a leg is cut off it will regenerate. The body is divided into two parts, the head and a segmented trunk. They breathe through spiracles, holes positioned along the body which is similar to a caterpillar.

HOUSING

Housing your centipede is easy. Any vivarium or enclosure will do providing they cannot escape. If using a glass tank with glass lids, be sure to check that the lid seals appropriately, especially in the corner of one of the lids (usually left for air hoses). Glass aquariums set up as a vivarium are ideal in this case as it is much easier to maintain humidity.



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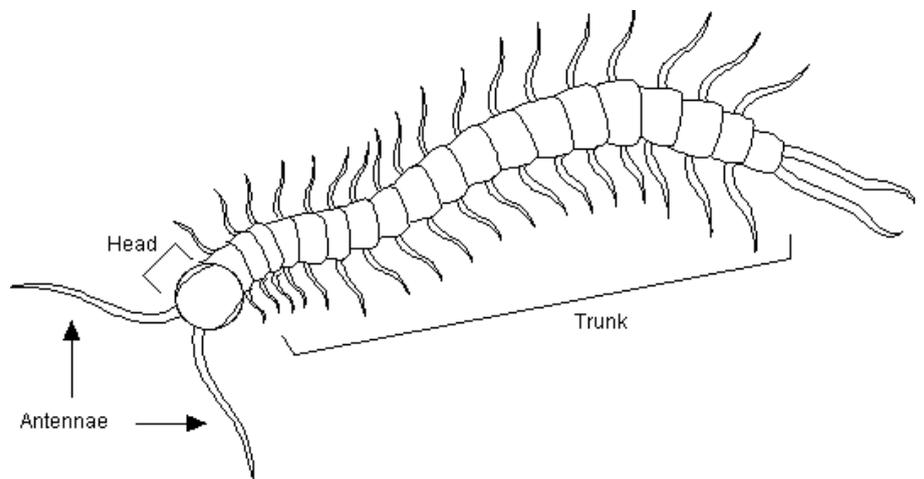
A soil substrate is ideal with a couple of heavy rocks on top and some mulch or leaf litter. Centipedes will not drink water and it is not really required as there should be plenty of moisture available.

FEEDING

Centipedes are carnivores (meat-eaters) that use venom to kill their prey. The venom comes from glands that open near the first pair of modified legs (which act as poisonous fangs). Their bite can be painful to a human but not lethal. Centipedes eat insects, earthworms, spiders, slugs, and other small animals. The largest centipede, (*Scolopendra gigas*) from the West Indies, also eats mice and some small lizards! This myriopod grows to be about 10 inches (25 cm) long and 1 inch wide.

REPRODUCTION

The average female centipede lays 60 sticky eggs (which are fertilized internally). She drops the eggs into a hole she digs in the soil. Some centipedes care for their eggs and the hatchlings.



GENERAL

Centipedes make an unusual and interesting pet. They are not suitable to be handled but fascinating to watch. Some species have brilliant colours.