

**Insects make ideal pets**

- Housing and equipment needed to look after insects is usually cheap, hardwearing and relatively easy to obtain (you may even have most of it around your house already).
- Insects are easy to look after: most insects can be fed on either leaves or fruit which only take a few minutes to find and cost virtually nothing!
- Insects have short life cycles so you can see your pet mature from larvae/egg to adult.
- They are easy to breed if you decide you want some more.
- Lots of insects are active throughout the day and often at night too. You can watch their interesting behaviour any time on "Insect TV".

**What sort of insects should I have?**

The best insects to keep as pets are those that are vegetarian and short-lived (3-24 months) such as stick insects or cockroaches.



Some insects are harder to keep in captivity than others. This group includes spiders, scorpions, preying mantis, centipedes and some of the larger stick insects. They may require extra heat and moisture and this means buying special equipment. These insects are often carnivorous and require live food. They may also be poisonous and dangerous to handle, or just very temperamental. There's nothing worse than spending a lot of time and money looking after something that is likely to die the minute you look away! They are also expensive so it is best to avoid having these insects as pets.

**Safety**

- MAKE SURE THAT YOU WASH YOUR HANDS THOROUGHLY AFTER HANDLING INSECTS OR SOIL.
  - CAREFULLY REPLACE THE LID OF THE TANK EACH TIME YOU OPEN IT: IF THE LID IS AT ALL LOOSE THEN PLACE SOMETHING HEAVY ON TOP OF IT.
  - GET SOMEONE RESPONSIBLE TO PET-SIT FOR YOU WHEN YOU ARE ON HOLIDAY.
- ALWAYS ASK YOUR PARENTS PERMISSION BEFORE GETTING ANY PET AND BE PREPARED TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR IT.

## What do you need to keep insects?

This depends on the type, size and number of insects, but a few basic things you will need are:

1. A glass tank such as a fish tank (even an old one that is cracked will do). The lid should be sealable, and preferably without holes. Remember - you can cover the holes from the inside of the tank, but be careful not to leave anything sticky where an insect might walk.
2. Peat soil, NOT compost as compost is treated with insecticide and other chemicals that will make your insects sick. A small bag costs only £3 - £5 and will last for ages. Put a good depth of peat in the tank (at least 4 inches if not more). You may want to mix some water in so that it is moist but not wet. This helps to maintain a humid atmosphere.
3. Some cork bark or clean dry twigs and branches to create hidey-holes and perching places for your pet. You can also use things like flowerpots and pipes to create tunnels. Try using old toys or lego if you want to be more creative - just make sure you wash them before you put them in the tank. If you are bringing wood in from the garden it is best to freeze it before putting it in your tank to kill any nasties that might harm your insects.
4. A water pot - a jam jar lid is ideal. If keeping stick insects you will need a water pot to put their food (bramble) in. Bury this in the soil at the bottom of the cage - leave a little bit sticking out though, and try to use a pot with a narrow neck otherwise your insects might fall in and drown.
5. A water mister/spray gun. Your mum might already have one of these for looking after her plants but you can buy a small one from high street pharmacists or your local garden centre.

## How to feed them

Beetles, millipedes and cockroaches need soft fruit such as bananas or strawberries and a small amount of cat biscuits to give them some protein. Stick insects eat bramble (the same plant that you get blackberries from) so all you need to do is make sure they have a fresh supply at all times. Other than that you just need to keep the tank somewhere warm (not hot as it will dry out) and out of any draughts. Don't put it in direct sunlight or right under a lamp but do make sure that the insects get a day and night. Keep the tank moist and humid by spraying it lightly each day. Remove old food before it starts to rot. It's as easy as that!



Other good insects to keep as pets include millipedes, and beetles such as fruit chafers - above is a picture of some *Pachnoda* (a type of fruit beetle). These make brilliant pets!