

Keeping a Pet Cockroach

An Introductory Information Leaflet

from

in association with

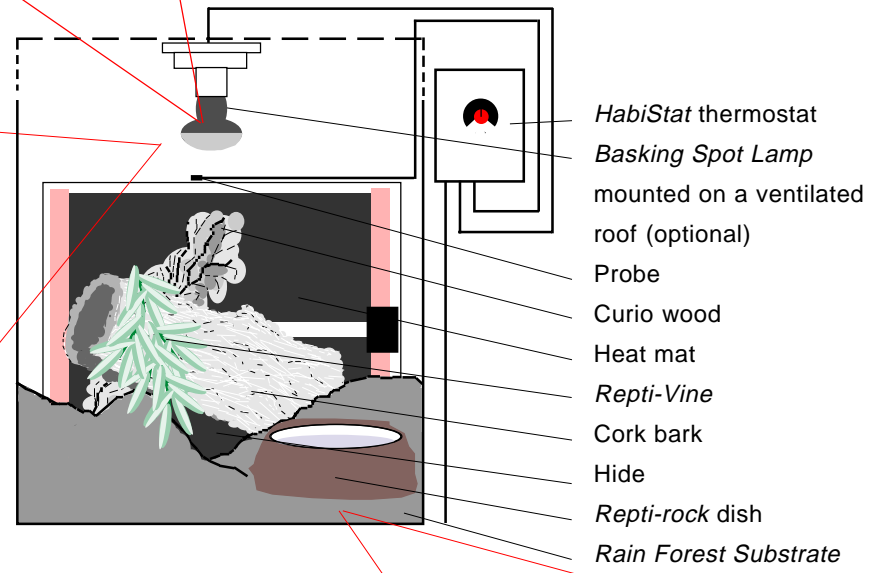
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Lighting
Many cockroaches shun bright lights, so artificial light in the cage should be subdued. Often, just the daylight filtering in will be enough. If more light is needed, a small Spot Lamp can be used and this will also provide much of the heat that is needed.

Background Heat
Use a heat mat between half and two thirds the size of the cage to provide background heating. The hottest spot in the cage should not be above 35°C while the coolest should not be below 25°C. Use a *HabiStat Mat-Stat* if the temperature is too hot but put the whole cage in a cooler place if the temperature is not cool enough.



Cleanliness and Hygiene: The cage will need cleaning out but only infrequently. A routine cleaner for all nonporous surfaces would be *Vetaclene*, followed by a thorough rinse. All other materials should be replaced when soiled. Any first aid the cockroach may need, can be given by dabbing the wound with *Vetadine*. As far as human hygiene is concerned, *Vetasept Surgical Scrub* will clean hands and surfaces while *Vetasept Hand Rub* will allow adequate cleansing and disinfection even in cases when water is unavailable.

A cage suitable for Cockroaches

Cage Decor: Use *Rain Forest Substrate* as it will stand up to the periodic spraying with water these cockroaches need. A *Repti-rock* water dish could be used to provide a drinking area, while *Cork Bark* and *Curio Wood* could be used to make an interesting three dimensional display. Draping *Repti-Vines* in the cage will provide refuges the cockroaches can hide in. *Repti-rock* caves would give even a final touch of functionality and security.

Food: Mainly fresh fruit and vegetables. To add variety, some individuals will eat the prepared dried foods used for lizards and tortoises. In fact almost all foods may be eaten, just experiment with anything edible to see if it stimulates the appetite of the cockroach!

Cage Set Up
The cage should be set up to allow an active cockroach plenty of scope to climb, burrow, warm itself, move to a cooler place and look for food. They will want an occasional drink and to secrete themselves into refuges and lay protected when shedding their skins.

Shopping List

Not every thing is needed to begin with, usually one item from each of the categories marked •. As a basic starting point the following essentials are considered the minimum needed:

Plastic Cage
Heat Mat
Rain Forest Substrate
Repti-rock dish
Thermometer
Repti-Vine
Piece of Cork Bark

After a while as your collection and experience grows other alternatives and extras can be used.

- **HabiStat Heat Mats**
(4x5/4w, 6x11/7w, 11x11/12w, 17x11/20w, 23x11/28w, 29x11/35w, 35x11/42w & 49x11/55w) & **Strips** (17x6/10w, 23x6/15w, 35x6/22w & 47x6/30w)
- **Thermometers** (Alcohol, dial, minimum - maximum & electronic digital)
- **Hygrometers** (Dial & electronic digital)
- **HabiStat Thermostats** (Mat-Stat/100w, Temperature/300w, Twin/2x300, Pulse Proportional/600w, Dimming/600w & Night Time Drop Function)
- **Repti-rock Dishes, Hides & Caves**
- **Repti-Vines**
- **Rain Forest Substrate Vermiculite**
- **Cork Bark**
- **Curio Wood**
- **Activa Professional Lights** (18"/15w, 24"/18w)
- **Black Lights** (18"/15w, 24"/20W)
- **Arcadia Control Units** (15w, 2x15w, 18w, 2x18w, 20w & 2x20w)
- **Mealworm Diet Plus**
- **Cricket Diet Plus**
- **Vetaclean**
- **Vetasept Surgical Scrub**
- **Vetasept Hand Rub**
- **Hand Spray**
- **Books & Leaflets**

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Pet Cockroach...

...Biology

Cockroaches are insects and in many way are similar to crickets and locusts. Even though they superficially look like beetles, they are not particularly related. They have a direct life cycle for example, where the young develop as a series of nymphs which look like smaller versions of the adult. Beetles and other more advanced insects go through an indirect life cycle and develop via a larva and pupa. Some cockroach species make very good pet animals and are the subject of this leaflet. Pet cockroaches will not infest the home if they escape and they have none of the stigma attached to them that is associated with their more verminous cousins.

Some of the best pet species are:

Madagascan Hissing Cockroach *Gromphadorhina portentosa*
Surinam Cockroach *Pycnoscelus surinamensis*
Death's Head Cockroach *Blaberus craniifer* and *B. discoidalis*

Some other cockroaches are not good pets at all. The species to avoid are: The Oriental Cockroach *Blatta orientalis*, The German Cockroach or Steam Fly *Blattella germanica* and the American Cockroach *Periplaneta americana*.

The types considered here are mainly tropical and are on the whole quite large insects. Like all insects, cockroaches have a tough exoskeleton, two pairs of wings and three pairs of jointed legs.

As the cockroach grows it will moult its outer skin periodically. On no account should it be touched or interfered with. It will cast off the old skin and the emerged cockroach will often have re-grown any legs that have been shed. The cockroach will be very soft and white and may take a hour or two to harden off, during which time it will not feed.

...Housing

The permanent cage need not be large, 25 cm. x 15 cm. x 15 cm. is enough for a couple of adult pairs. The cage should be set up in a manner similar to the diagram overleaf. A heater can be installed to provide a background temperature of between 25°C and 35°C. This is best done with an *HabiStat* mat or strip taped to the inside of the back wall of a wooden cage or either side if the wall is glass or plastic. Make sure the mat acts like a radiator, so very little of it should be below the line of the substrate.

Much of the success achieved in keeping cockroaches will come from the skilful manipulation of ventilation. Some of these animals require highish humidity others like it much dryer but all will benefit from some ventilation. Fresh air moving into the cage is essential. Use the upward draughts caused by heated air rising to flush out the cage and drag fresh air in. A light misting with a hand sprayer will provide the 40% to 80% humidity required. Some species will require the substrate to be damp but not wringing wet. Look in the literature for details of the particular species being kept.

...Husbandry

Most species will live in groups. Many will want to hide for most of the day, so shelters should feature in the cage design.

These animals do not really like being handled, so if it is necessary to move them, pick them up in an enclosed hand. They have two defences. One is to sick up some fluid that may stain the hand and the other is to kick out with spiky legs and feet. This will give the sensation of tiny pin pricks but is not at all dangerous.

In time the cage will begin to look scruffy as faeces and debris builds up. As everything recommended for the cage is washable or disposable, a good clean out is easily done. The cage set up advised in this leaflet is practicable and can be made to look pleasing to the eye. It can be made to look quite natural even without using live plants which are best left until some experience is gained. In any case, some of the very informative books on Insects in general and cockroaches in particular could be investigated.

...Food & Feeding

These cockroaches are not at all fussy about their food and will eat almost anything edible. Feeding pet cockroaches is easy and the best foods seem to be fresh fruit and vegetables. In addition the dry pelleted diets used for lizards or tortoises are quite suitable and extremely convenient.

Feed the cockroaches once or twice every week with enough to be eaten in about a couple of days. Do not to leave an excess of uneaten food in the cage as it will quickly decompose and pollute the cage.

A water dish kept full of fresh water should always be available. The cockroaches should be able to freely approach and leave the water dish via a suitable surface. A steep or very smooth water dish will hamper their activity and may even cause them to drown! Repti-Rock dishes are specially made to minimise the problem.

...Reproduction

To sex a cockroach, both male and female specimens are initially required. Upon inspection, the tail region is seen to have slightly larger cerci or small feelers in males. Females are sometimes found to be carrying a capsule of developing eggs. Male hissing cockroaches have knobbed projections on the segment after the head.

Breeding is not at all difficult, just put mature males and females together in a half decent environment, nature will do the rest. Most species lay an egg capsule containing several eggs. The female will carry this around in her vent prior to laying. Other species will give birth to live young.

...Health & Disease

Cockroaches may take several months to reach adult, it will depend on temperature, food availability and stocking density. Once adult, life expectancy is usually a few more months. They do not suffer from many diseases and special attention is rarely needed. An environment and diet as described in this leaflet will preclude most problems. Good practice, hygiene and first aid will probably deal with rest. If real disease or injury is discovered, a suitable authority may of course, be consulted. Pet cockroaches do not pose a real threat to human health. All the normal hygiene precautions regarding humans and animals should be observed.