

Keeping a Pet Mantis

An Introductory Information Leaflet

from

in association with

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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 stick insects 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.

Lighting

Many mantis 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* may be used and in which case it will double as an effective heater.

Food: Live

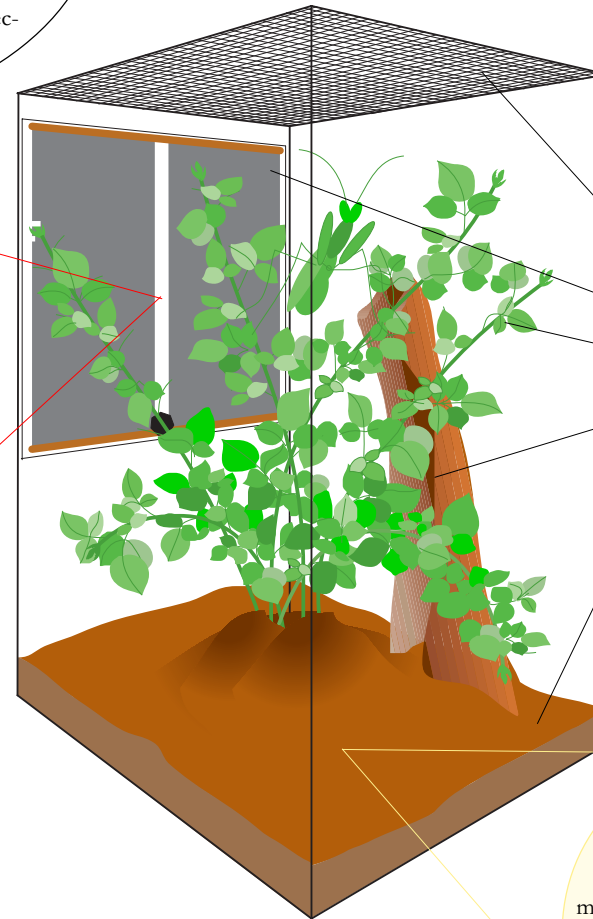
insects like crickets and locust will form the bulk of the diet. To add variety, a few mealworms or waxworms can be offered. In fact almost any live insect, spider or other small creature will be tackled. Just experiment with anything edible to see if it stimulates the appetite of the mantis!

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 30°C while the coolest should not be below 20°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.

Cage Decor: Use

Rain Forest Substrate as it will stand up to the periodic spraying with water these mantis need. *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 mantis can hide in.



Ventilated roof

Heat mat

Repti-Vine

Cork bark hide

Rain Forest Substrate

Cage Set Up

The cage should be set up to allow an active mantis plenty of scope to climb, warm itself, move to a cooler place and look for food. They will want an occasional drink and to secrete themselves into refuges and hide. They will also need a secure surface to hang from when shedding their skins.

A cage suitable
for Mantids

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**
- **Repti-Vines**
- **Rain Forest Substrate**
Vermiculite
- **Cork Bark**
- **Curio Wood**
- **Basking Spot Lamps** (Normal, Daylight & Red)
- **Basking Spot Lamp Holders**
- **Activa Professional Lights** (18"/15w, 24"/18w)
- **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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EURO REP
L I M I T E D

The Cottage in the Wall, Dawley Road, Hayes, Middlesex. UB3 1EF
Telephone: 0181 573 4311, Fax: 0181 561 1650
email: eurorep@btinternet.com
website: www.EuroRep.co.uk

Pet Mantids...

...Biology

Mantids are insects and in many ways are similar to crickets and locusts. 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. More advanced insects go through an indirect life cycle and develop via a larva and pupa. Some mantis species make very good pet animals and are the subject of this leaflet. Pet mantids will not infest the home if they escape and are completely harmless to humans and almost all other animals larger than themselves.

Some of the best pet species are:

African Green Mantis *Sphrodromanti centralis* & *S. lineola*
Egyptian Mantis *Miomantis* spp.
Dead Leaf Mantis *Dendroplatys* spp.
Chinese Mantis *Tenodera sinensis*

Some other mantids are not so good as pets. This is because they are a little tricky to rear and breed. Once some experience has been gained, however, it is quite possible to be successful with them. The species for the more experienced are: The Orchid Mantis *Hymenopus coronatus*, The Target Mantis *Creobroter* spp. and the common European Mantis *Mantis religiosa*.

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

As the mantis grows it will moult its outer skin periodically. It will need a clear space to hang in of about twice its length. On no account should it be touched or interfered with during this process. It will cast off the old skin and the emerged mantis will often have regrown any legs that have been shed. The mantis will be very soft and pale 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, 15 cm. x 25 cm. x 15 cm. is enough for anything up to an adult. The cage should be set up in a manner similar to the diagram overleaf. A heater should 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 mantids will come from the skilful manipulation of ventilation. Some of these animals require highish humidity others like it much dryer but none can stand stagnant air conditions. 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 can only be kept singly as they are habitual cannibals. Many will just sit motionless for most of the day, so plenty of perches

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 by coaxing them onto a finger without holding them. They have two defences. One is to display their wings and forelimbs in threat and the other is to kick out with spiky legs. This will give the sensation of tiny pin pricks but is not at all dangerous. If grasped the larger specimens may attempt to nibble the offending finger. They rarely break the skin.

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 mantids in particular could be investigated.

...Food & Feeding

These mantids are not at all fussy about their food and will eat almost anything they can overpower. Feeding pet mantids is easy and the best foods seem to be live moving insects like crickets and locusts. In addition they may be offered mealworms, waxworms and when very small, fruit fly.

Feed the mantids every couple of days with enough to be eaten in about an hour. Do not to leave an excess of uneaten food in the cage as it will quickly annoy the mantis and may even attack it.

...Reproduction

To sex a mantis, both male and female specimens are initially required. Females are usually larger and more robust. Upon inspection, the tail region is seen to have slightly larger cerci or small feelers in males. Females have fewer abdominal segments than males but counting them is not easy. The females are, of course, the only sex to lay egg cases.

Breeding is not at all difficult but the notorious tendency for the female to eat the male is fraught with hazards. Most species lay an egg case containing many eggs. The female will lay this on a convenient surface after mating. If breeding is contemplated, one of the many publications should be investigated.

The young will hatch from the egg case after the required incubation period. They will be cannibalising from the beginning but most people do not separate them until the numbers have thinned out a little. This may seem somewhat harsh but it is a very natural way of allowing the stronger individuals to benefit from the weaker ones.

...Health & Disease

Mantids may take several months to reach adult, it will depend on temperature, food availability and other factors. 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 mantids do not pose a real threat to human health. All the normal hygiene precautions regarding humans and animals should be observed.