



## **SEA DWELLERS AND FRIENDS**

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### **CRICKET TECH SHEET**

In the United States the brown cricket is the most common commercially available feeder insect. They are available from pet stores as well as from commercial cricket breeders. A common problem that has plagued most people involved with captive reptiles and amphibians at one time or another is keeping crickets. There are about as many different ways to keep crickets as there are people who keep them. With this article we will outline the basics that are needed to sustain crickets and show examples of ways to keep them.

#### **Cage**

The container that crickets are kept in needs to be escape proof and well-ventilated. Many people that keep only a few dozen crickets at a time prefer to use plastic pet containers, often called critter keepers. These work very well when only a small number of crickets are being housed. For keeping larger numbers of crickets, large plastic storage containers or glass aquariums with screen covers can be used. The lids of plastic storage containers can be modified to allow better ventilation by cutting out a large hole and duct-taping aluminum window screen over it. There are also a number of cages that are specifically designed for keeping crickets that work well.

The bottom of the container can be lined with a simple substrate such as paper towels or newspaper. This will make it easier to clean the cage. A bare-bottom can also be used if the container is cleaned often. Other things that will need to go inside of the cage are a hiding spot (cardboard egg carton or crumpled newspaper), a water source and food.

The environment that crickets are kept in will play a large role in how many survive and live long enough to be used as food. Always keep crickets above 75F (24C). This can be achieved in cool areas by using a low wattage heat lamp to heat the cage. It's also important to keep the cage dry. Although crickets do need moisture in their environment to drink from, they should never be kept in humid or moist areas. The other important part of their environment is cleanliness. Dead crickets should be removed from the cage regularly to prevent disease from spreading and any food that becomes old or molds-over should be removed as soon as it's noticed.

#### **Food**

In order to keep crickets alive they need to be fed. Neglecting to feed crickets is probably the most common reason people have trouble keeping them alive. Most pet stores do not feed their crickets and when they are purchased the crickets are often very hungry and have a low calorie count. In order to get the most out of the crickets, it's best to house them for a day with food so that they can fill themselves prior to being offered to your pet.

Crickets should be fed a healthy diet before being fed to reptiles and amphibians. This will restore the nutrients that were lost in the crickets during the time they spent in transit or at the pet store. Feeding feeder insects healthy foods prior to feeding them to other animals is often called gut loading. A good cricket diet should consist of both fresh vegetables and fruits as well as a dry component. Good vegetables and fruits to offer are different types of lettuce, apples, oranges, sprouts, carrots and melons. Good dry diets to use in combination with the vegetables and fruits include high quality fish flake, dry dog food and ground oats. Other foods that can be offered to the crickets are: green beans, orange squash, parsnips, cantaloupe, apples, pears, ground monkey chow with calcium powder, or high protein salad mix with reptile vitamins.

There are also many commercial diets available. Some work reasonably well while others just don't seem to cut it. It's important to understand what the intended use of the commercial cricket food is before offering it to the crickets. Many cricket foods are designed to put vitamins and minerals that are beneficial to reptiles and amphibians into crickets. Unfortunately, crickets don't have the same nutritional needs as reptiles and amphibians and often these foods will kill large amounts of crickets if they are the only food offered over a long period of time. When buying a cricket diet, try to find one that is designed to sustain the feeder insects rather than to put large amounts of vitamins and minerals into them. The vitamin and mineral content of a cricket is better changed to suite reptiles and amphibians with high quality powdered vitamin and mineral supplements rather than with commercial gut loading products.

## Water

Providing a source of moisture is vital if the crickets are going to be kept for more than a few days. Crickets will drown easily in standing water. Wet a paper towel and crumple it up into a ball to provide water. A moist sponge or piece foam rubber can also be used. The moist paper towels, sponge or foam can be placed on a petri dish or jar lid to prevent the substrate in the cage from absorbing all of the water. A shallow bowl of water with gravel or rocks in it so the crickets can climb up on them to hop out works well. Slices of fresh cut potato, fruit, and vegetables can also be given as a water source.

Some products that are available in store for cricket care:

- All sizes of Kritter Keepers
- Kricket Keepers
- Rep-cal calcium
- Rep-cal multi-vitamin powder
- Zilla gut load cricket food
- Zilla cricket drink w/calcium
- Zoo Med Reptile Vitamins
- Monkey chow