

# How Do I Care For My Crickets?

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Next to Silkworms, crickets are the most nutritious feeder bug readily available that you can feed to your reptile. This is because your reptiles are what they eat, and crickets will eat **everything** (including each other if there isn't any food)! This is what makes crickets a great vehicle or delivery system to get your reptile the nutrition it needs.

The cricket that is exclusively sold in pet stores in North America is the **grey house cricket** (*Acheta domestica*). It can be stored in high volumes and is quite prolific given the right parameters.

## How Do I House Them?

Depending on the volume you need weekly, an appropriate sized plastic "faunarium" with a ventilated lid will do fine. If you are housing several thousand crickets at a time, consider using a ten gallon glass aquarium with a tight fitting aluminum screen lid (window screen). Do not use nylon mesh as crickets can chew through this.

Use an appropriate amount of clean, dry cardboard egg crating to create more surface area for your crickets to roam and hide within the holding container. The dry cardboard also helps to prevent excess humidity from building up which is deadly to your crickets. Broken up into easily managed pieces, the crickets can easily be lifted from the holding container to your cricket feeding cup to be dusted and distributed to your reptiles. This way, the squeamish won't have a need to touch each individual cricket and hopefully none escape in the transfer!

Keep your cricket container in a warm, dry area. Basements, garages or outdoors are a quick way to wipe out all your bugs as the temperature and humidity may be inappropriate. Warm and dry is the key!!! Remember to wash your container between each new batch of crickets you buy.

## How Do I Feed Them?

As mentioned before, crickets are a great feeder item because they will eat everything you feed them. "Gutloading" your crickets, by giving them a nutritious vitamin packed diet will enhance the life of your crickets, and your reptile. Feed up your bugs for 24 hours before serving to your reptiles.

There are many commercial cricket diets available on the market. We carry several at Big Al's, as well as our own **superfood** made and sold exclusively at our Hamilton store. This dry diet put into a corner or into an overturned lid inside the holding container will work perfect.

To hydrate your crickets, use an open cut piece of carrot, potato or zucchini as a nutritious water source. The crickets will easily be able to crawl over and eat these vegetables without drowning. You will have to change the veggies every couple of days as they dry out or are devoured completely.

Never mist your crickets, or use water bowls or moist sponges to water your crickets. One drop of water can turn into a rotting, stinky disaster in a cricket container. Be wary of "jelly waters" as well,

as too much of this can create too much humidity and wipe out your crickets. That being said, too many veggies in a small space can create the same effect and make too much humidity in your container.

### **Calcium and Multivitamins;**

Crickets sold in pet stores are generally deficient in vitamins, minerals and amino acids by the time they are sold and get to your house. In general, a cricket is high in phosphorus and low in calcium by a ratio of 2:1. It is your duty to try and level this out. Before feeding to your reptile, crickets need to be dusted (shake and bake) in a powdered calcium supplement at least 3 times a week. If you keep your reptiles housed indoors (which is generally the case in Canada) then you will need a calcium with D3 supplement, if you keep your reptiles housed outdoors than no D3 is required. In conjunction with calcium, a multivitamin is strongly recommended once a week to round out the essential nutrition.

Gutloading is not an alternative to calcium and vitamin supplementation, but should be used together for the best possible nutrition.

### **How Long Will They Last?**

Typically, a cricket will live approximately 8 weeks from hatching out of an egg to dying of old age. As the crickets grow, they will **moult** or shed their skin, leaving behind a dry exoskeleton that resembles a cricket exactly. The emerging cricket will be white in colouration until the body armour hardens up and it turns its usual brownish grey colour. The newly emerged cricket is soft and may be an easy target to predation by other crickets. Do not confuse dry moults with dead crickets. Dead crickets are generally black and mushy.

Young crickets can moult their skin every 3 days until they reach a ½" size. After this, they typically shed every 7 days. On the last moult, the cricket is sexually mature and develops its wings. The wings are responsible for the chirping noise, and both males and females have the wings. An adult cricket emerging from its final moult will live about 2 weeks before dying. This is why you may have higher than normal losses with a large size rather than purchasing a ¾" or medium size. Since ¾" medium crickets don't have wings yet, you will have far less noise until they go through that last moult.

### **What Is This I Hear About A Cricket Virus?**

In 2002, a cricket adenovirus was shed by a Germany cricket farmer. By the end of 2002 all major cricket growers in Europe were wiped out. This cricket has never been successfully reproduced in Europe since. Ten years later, despite everybody's best efforts, this same adenovirus made its way to North America and have destroyed most of the top cricket growing companies beyond recovery.

This virus affects only the grey house cricket and has no effects on other bugs or reptiles being fed. It attacks the cricket in its last moulting cycle, wiping out 75% or more of the crickets during that shed. Of the 25% of the surviving crickets, 75% of those will wipe out and so on. Because of the demand in volume seen by cricket farmers who took precautions against this virus and are still successful, we have seen shortages in supply and increases in costs as the farmers continue to grow to meet the demand. In Europe, reptile keepers use a wide variety of cricket species, roaches and locusts to feed to their pets. Unfortunately, it is illegal to sell or propagate these alternative bugs in North America at this time.