

ROACH CARE SHEET

GENERAL:

Rearing roaches as a viable food source is becoming increasingly popular in the United States and many other countries. As hobbyists first and business people second we always want to provide the best possible food for our animals. For years many of us have suffered the wrath of the cricket industry. As competition has increased, service and quality have suffered. Today we find a market with diseased, bug infested, and poorly nourished crickets. I am not saying all dealers are bad, just pointing out what many others and I have seen over the past 5-10 years. Many of us have turned to other food items such as mealworms, waxworms, and silkworms. Although good as supplemental food sources, I don't think any of these possess all the required characteristics to make a staple food source. It was a few years back that I was introduced to roaches. Very skeptical at first, I decided to forgo my bias and give them a try. After receiving and setting them up, I soon realized they were not bad, but just another bug. Another huge plus was the great reaction I received from my pets. They all attacked the roaches like it was what they were supposed to be eating all along. After much reading and discussion I have learned that roaches are truly the "Ultimate Feeder". They have the highest meat to shell ratio of any feeder on the market, they can be bred by anybody, you can to a degree control their growth with temperature adjustments, and they eat almost anything which makes them easy to gut load with the proper nutrition. Another huge plus is most species have very little odor and are very clean insects. So now after many years of keeping and breeding several species I have learned several things, and hope this care sheet will help you avoid some of my mistakes.

HOUSING:

There are several effective ways to house tropical roaches. The three I will talk about are the glass aquarium, the rubbermaid container, and the bucket cage.

1. The first set-up would be your standard 10-20 gallon glass aquarium. I recommend using paper bags, cardboard, or black paper to cover the four sides, unless you're keeping your roaches in a dark area. A screen top should be used, as it may be possible for small nymphs to climb the silicone in the corners of the glass. Also, certain species can climb and other winged species can flutter their wings and jump a foot or two (very uncommon).
2. Next we have the rubbermaid container. These can be found at pretty much any hardware store or the Kmart/Wal-Mart/Target stores. Usually you can get them in dark green, blue, or clear. The next step would be to either cut out a section of the lid and add screen mesh for ventilation, or drill holes in the lid. I have seen people keep roaches in these types of bins without lids, but the lid will provide full security from possible escapees. Some can climb, and even with barriers a lid adds extra protection. With the non-climbers/flyers winged males will sometimes flutter their wings and have been known to jump a foot or two. Although this is rare to see, the lid will make sure none of these (want to be a bird) males never get out.
3. Finally we come to the bucket cage. This is the only one I personally have not used yet. Many people do like them though. From the pictures I've seen you take a five-gallon bucket that you should be able to get from most hardware stores. Then you cut a 5" by 5" or so hole on each side and add in mesh for ventilation. I suppose this may also be done on the lid as well. Pretty simple, but since I keep my roaches in a rack system, the rubbermaid's work better for me.

SUBSTRATE/CAGE DÉCOR:

Substrate choices can include soil, cypress mulch, sphagnum moss, coconut bark, or just egg cartons. I have two types of set-ups I use. I have seen a number of people using alfalfa pellets, red bran, and other similar items as substrate. Although nice to have for roaches to nibble on, these substrates do not tolerate water and usually become very problematic. Keep it simple and keeping roaches will be much easier. For

species like the *Blaptica dubia*, *Blaberus discoidalis*, and a few others that are small winged species, I keep them with no substrate and just fill three quarters of the container with vertically stacked egg crates. For other larger winged species or ones that require more humidity like *Blaberus craniifer*, *giganteus*, and *fusca*, I use sphagnum moss in the bottom (usually ½”) with stacked pieces of bark for hiding. It is key to have many hiding places by adding egg crates and paper towel rolls. Other things like bark or logs can be added for looks or for hiding places. It is important to use substrate sparingly as it only makes cleaning a longer process. For cleaning I have a separate container set-up and I usually will knock the egg crates on the side of the new container to get all the roaches off, then sift the remaining substrate. I recommend cleaning every two to three month depending on the size of the colony and how dirty the cage gets. Cleaning a non-substrate container with hundreds to thousands of roaches usually takes me less than thirty minutes. With substrate it takes between thirty to sixty minutes depending on the number of nymphs

LIGHTING/HEATING:

Depending on the species, roach temperatures can range from 75F-100F. For breeding and growth I recommend keeping most species at 80F-95F. There should be ample space for your roaches to choose a cool or hot side of the container. There are a few different methods used. The first is room temperature of 70F. In a normal room this will lead to slow growth and breeding. If you have a warmer reptile room then you will get medium growth and breeding. The next method of heating uses light bulbs or ceramic heaters. I do know a few people that use red lights and think it's a must, but I have never needed them or figured out a good way to use them. My personal preferences are heat tape (flex-watt) or heat rope. Both of these items can be found at most reptile shops or online. Underneath heat can be used on about half of the container giving your roaches some options to the hot or colder side. They can also climb higher up on the egg cartons if they don't want to be right on the heat. Important note, dropping most tropical species below 70F for anything longer than 24 hours is asking for problems. This is why these species are not considered pests. If they get outside their controlled environment they usually will not live too long. Certain states like Florida and Arizona may be the exception, but they still need water and food.

BEHAVIOR:

Roaches stay hidden most of the time and that is why I use dark containers with lots of egg crates. They will pretty much sit around and do very little unless they are eating and drinking. You will see them breeding every once in a while with their rear ends attached to each other. You will also see the females extend their egg sack (ootheca) out and rotate. Try to disturb them as little as possible for optimum breeding results.

FEEDING/SUPPLEMENTATION:

Roaches will eat just about anything, but as with all insects you want to pass good things on to your reptiles. A good staple diet of high protein dog, cat, or lab chow is a start. Oats, bran, and chicken scratch can also be mixed in, but must be kept clean and dry to avoid mites. A good way to blend food is with coffee bean grinders. They like almost any fruits or veggies. I feed plenty of oranges, apples, carrots, or whatever else I have in the fridge. Try not to leave too much standing food and watch closely for mold.

WATER:

Some people use water dishes, but they tend to be hard to access for nymphs and can also become drowning grounds. I do not use water dishes but instead use other methods. I pretty much mist my roaches every other day. Although not necessary they like it and it brings them all out. Another good water source is water crystals which are available just about everywhere. Lastly your roaches will get moisture from the fresh fruits and veggies you are giving them.

GENERAL NOTES:

If kept properly roaches are very easy to maintain and breed. Most have 15-30 babies that start out 1/8” and depending on the species can get to about 2” to 4”. From birth to adulthood can take 3-6 months or more. Usually the amount of time is relevant to the temps and food provided. Roaches typically can live

from one to three years. If kept below 85F breeding will slow and if temps get too low they may not breed at all. None of these roaches are considered PESTS and will not infest your home. More caution needs to be applied with species like lobsters as they can climb and multiply much faster than the other species. I really did not discuss the climbing species very much. Climbers like hispers (*Gromphadorhina portentosa*) and lobsters (*Nauphoeta cinerea*) are very commonly used as feeders. Most people buy these first because they are cheaper due to the fact that they reproduce quicker. It is very easy to contain climbers by using Vaseline, Bug Stop, or certain types of oil (vegetable). Where I always run into the problems is feeding them off. If you hand feed or use tweezers then they are great, otherwise they can escape very easily if not watched. Because these two species reproduce so fast they can make for an excellent food source, but I recommend getting some experience with non-climbers first. If you can be patient and spend a little more time building a good non-climbing colony, you will never need to deal with climbers. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Mites/Mold:

Old fruits and veggies, wet conditions, and bran products can all lead to mites and or mold. I have not heard of mites being harmful to the roaches, but proper husbandry should keep them away. Mold however can be detrimental, so keep fresh food and clean conditions.