Crabotanicals Care Sheet
For Land Hermit Crabs

Your crabs were kidnapped! They cannot reproduce in captivity because an artificial environment cannot duplicate the natural conditions needed for eggs to mature. So each crab that you buy was taken from a beach where they were accustomed to a wild diet with specific temperature and humidity.

Basics:

Crab: Choosing a crab can be a lot of fun. Look over the potential pet for mites, broken antennae, chipped or missing limbs, etc. Try to pick one with bright coloring (relative to his species) who is somewhat active. What about size? Bigger crabs are older and obviously require more space than small crabs do. You can mix crabs of different species, sex, and size in the same tank as long as they have plenty of resources to share (food, shells, space, etc.). If the tips of his legs have sharp black points, then he has recently molted and won’t have to go through that right away. When you get him home, he will need to destress, so resist the urge to handle him until he seems calm and comfortable. He may eat excessively (that is a good sign) or he may hide underground for weeks (that is okay too).

Heat and humidity are vital to the health of your pet. You will need to modify a tank with a lid that allows fresh air to circulate, but that also retains heat and humidity. Guages are necessary (both thermometer and hygrometer). Heat should stabilize at 70-80°. To create and maintain heat, you need a heat source (a moon-glo bulb, a UTH, or both) that is rated for your tank size.

Water: All species of hermit crabs need fresh and salt water for drinking. You need to dechlorinate tapwater for fresh water. Do not use a dechlorinator with Stress Coat. From this fresh water mix, you can add sea-salt crystals (sold for saltwater aquariums) to make salt water. Use the directions for brine shrimp.

Food: Crabs are scavengers and will eat just about anything. In the wild, they eat all manner of meats, seaweed, leaf-litter—even the rotten stuff. Crbotanicals is highly concerned with providing a varied, healthy diet to maintain the brilliant color of your crabs and general well-being. It is important to know that calcium is vital for maintaining a crab’s exoskeleton, especially when a crab is ready to molt. Protein is vital and a lack of it could result in aggressive behavior. We recommend that you avoid food sources that contain preservatives. The more variety you can offer, the better. Never consider a single source of food complete (even a high-quality, all-natural mix). Even something labeled a “staple” is not enough without fresh additions on a regular basis. You can buy several high-quality mixes and alternate them every few days. Crabs love apples, mangos, raisins, shrimp, coconut, walnut, eggs, and honey; but they need more. Avoid feeding anything seasoned, salted, or canned.

Substrate: Sand is economical and doesn’t support mold growth unless it is improperly cleaned. Ground coconut husk is also mold resistant. These can be mixed. Gravel can be cleaned and re-used but should not be used alone since crabs need something to dig caves in when molting. Moss is nice for humidity but highly prone to mold. It is best used in a separate container that can be removed from the tank in a day or two. Substrate should be wet enough to form (like you’d use for building a sand castle) and at least twice as deep as your tallest crab.

Shells: Hermit crabs need access to seashells to change into as they grow. Providing extra shells with “O” or “D” shaped openings will provide some options and keep peace between tank mates. We do not recommend buying painted shells.

Extras: We call these “extras” because you probably have something suitable lying around the house. You need at least 3 dishes (for fresh water, salt water, and food). They need a place to hide and something to climb. We like cholla for this because it can be nibbled for food (cellulose is important for digestion). Coconut huts resist mold and make nice hide-a-ways. A small ceramic mug or terracotta pot turned on its side and partially buried can also be used for a cave.

Maintenance: Every day you should rinse and re-fill water dishes and bathing pools. Scoop poop everyday and remove any mold. Food dishes
should be emptied and cleaned every day. Once a month, or so, you should do a deep-clean, washing everything and replacing the substrate.

Cautions:

Pincers: Hermit crabs do pinch when threatened and it does hurt. Pinching is usually a result of mishandling. When handling a crab you should keep your palm outstretched so there is nothing for the crab to grasp, and you should move slowly so the crab doesn’t wobble or feel insecure.

Metal: Hermit crabs should not be exposed to any kind of metal. Always use ceramic, glass, resin, or plastic dishes; and never feed them anything cooked in a cast-iron or non-stick cookware.

Mold: Molds flourish in the humid environment of a crabitat. You must disinfect everything you put in the tank by baking, boiling, or steaming. If you use sponges for humidity, you must boil them often or they will “sour.” Food should be removed and replaced at the first sign of mold. Salt retards mold growth so you may consider wetting your substrate with weak salt water.

Molting: Molting is perfectly natural for a hermit crab, but can be very unnerving for you. Once they have out-grown their exoskeleton, they will shed it allowing a new soft one underneath to appear. The shedding of the exo happens very quickly, but the new one takes time to harden, especially for larger crabs. They should not be handled or disturbed during this vulnerable period—even if they remain buried for a month or more.

Sometimes a crab will molt on the surface. Do not remove the shed exoskeleton. The crab will eat this to replace the calcium he has lost and harden the new “skin.” Oftentimes the entire population will molt at once, but you should continue to keep food, water, and salt water handy.

Population: Overcrowding can cause aggressive behavior that could result in injury or even death. You should have at least 2 crabs because they are social creatures and need to interact with their own kind, but never buy more pets than you can properly care for. It may be beneficial for the pair of crabs to be the same species.

Longevity: with good care, hermit crabs raised in captivity may live five-ten years, and two such crabs are still living after 30 years!

Tips:

Join an online hermit crab forum. No care sheet can cover every possible question you may have or anticipate every situation you may encounter. Becoming a member of a forum will put you in contact with other crab keepers who have experience, and will give you the opportunity to share what you have learned with others. Networking with other hermit crab enthusiasts will help keep alive your interest in your new pet which is great for kids and adults alike.

Exercise: We believe that exercise is very important. Letting the crabs out to wander the living room for an evening is great fun for the crab and their owners. Care should be taken to ensure that the crabs do not disappear under furniture, get eaten by other pets, or get stepped on by other occupants. Climbing toys in the tank give them a chance to stretch their legs too.

Miscellaneous:

Bathing and handling are issues that are widely debated. Some crab keepers provide a dish of water deep enough for the crab to submerge in (this is considered necessary for some species). Bathing is a great way to introduce new crabs to an existing population. A dip in a community pool gets everyone’s odor on everyone else while they get acquainted. Even non-bathers use this method to keep the introductions peaceful.

Handling should be done with care (if at all) making sure that the handler does not get pinched and that the crab does not get dropped. Never try to pull a crab out of his shell. He needs the shell to protect the vital organs in his soft abdomen. It is possible to enjoy hermit crabs as an “eyes only” pet.

Isolation: Some crabbers recommend isolating molting crabs while others feel this is only necessary in an overcrowded tank. An isolation booth should be at the ready to use as a nursery for a sick or injured crab. Isolating ensures that they will not be disturbed by other crabs. An isolation tank should be outfitted with all of the comforts of the main tank. A critter keeper that fits inside the main tank will eliminate the need for more gauges & additional heat source.

For more information please visit: http://hermitcrabfoodtrials.blogspot.com

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