



General care

Stick insects normally stay healthy throughout their lives if they are kept in the right conditions. If you are worried about the health of your stick insect contact your vet.



Shopping List

Vivarium or fine mesh container	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓	Light bulb	<input type="checkbox"/>	✓
Thermostat	<input type="checkbox"/>		Heat pad	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Leaf food – usually bramble	<input type="checkbox"/>		Water container (not for all)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Floor covering	<input type="checkbox"/>				

This leaflet is produced by the Pet Care Trust, the national charity that promotes the benefits of pet ownership and education. For more information, go to www.petcare.org.uk, or phone 01234 273933.



Remember you must never release your pet into the wild.



CARING FOR YOUR STICK INSECTS

There are nearly 3000 species of stick insect world wide. Their Latin name Phasmatodea comes from the word phasmos meaning 'ghost', Although well over one hundred species are kept in captivity, fewer than twenty are generally obtainable in the pet trade.

Stick insects are relatively easy to keep and are an ideal source of interest and study. Their usually green or brown colouring and delicate twig like shape form the perfect camouflage which lets them 'disappear' into their habitats.

Stick insects may be kept with other stick insects of the same species but overcrowding must be avoided.

Pet shops should be able to let you have a list of what is available. You will be offered either eggs, nymphs (immature adults without wings) or adults. It is often wiser to begin with nymphs as eggs can take some time to hatch, and mature adults may only live a few weeks.





Housing

Before you get your stick insects their living quarters should be prepared. The main points to remember are security and space.

A converted aquarium with a specially fitted ventilated lid can house several stick insects. It must be tall enough to allow them to hang upside down as they moult. Small plastic animal carriers are another option but may not be high enough. In general cages should be at least three times as high as an adult stick insect, kept in it. Your pet shop will be pleased to advise you. Most species require a temperature of between 70 to 86°F (21-30°C) and a small heat pad, best controlled by a thermostat, and placed under the slightly raised cage is the safest and most efficient method of supplying this. Newspaper or sheets of plain white paper are easily replaceable as a floor covering, alternatively sand or bark chips can be used.

Humidity

The humidity requirements for stick insects varies between species but is often quite high; up to 80% relative humidity for rain forest species. Regardless of this all stick insects need water and it is a good policy to thoroughly mist the inside of the cage including all the food plant material each evening before you go to bed or before lights out. Some stick-insects such as *Haaniella spp.* need open water in a low bowl to drink, don't be too concerned if they leave their heads under water remember that insect breath threw their thoracic and abdominal spiracles not through their mouths like us. Note also that in some places tap water can harm some species so it doesn't hurt to use either rain water or to let the tap water stand, in an open container, for a day to remove chlorine.



Feeding and water

Stick insects spend most of their lives climbing and feeding on leaves. Most species can be maintained on a diet of leaves of bramble (blackberry), rose, or *Viburnum rhytidophllum*. If picking leaves from the wild it is important to avoid any which have been treated with chemical sprays and they should always be washed under running water. Privet and ivy, available year round, will also be taken by the Common Indian Stick Insect and some species such as the beautiful Peruvian Stick Insect will feed almost exclusively on privet. The food, on a stem, should be placed upright in the bottom of the cage in a container of water which cannot be knocked over or the water accessed. A few dry twigs can be used as climbing frames. The floor covering should be changed regularly, taking care not to discard any wanted eggs. Stick insects shed their skins at regular intervals as they outgrow them. Having moulted for the last time stick insects are approaching the end of their natural lifespan. This can be as short as a couple of months though some females will survive over six months as adults.



Handling

Stick insects have very delicately formed bodies and limbs and must be handled with great care. Some shed legs if roughly handled. Nymphs can be moved by encouraging them to crawl onto a leaf.

Breeding

Stick insects lay eggs, which hatch out as nymphs, which go through a series of moults before becoming adult. Female adults are generally larger and stockier than males, and generally take longer to mature. In some species the females can reproduce without requiring males. Eggs are laid in various ways depending on the species and some are just scattered on the floor of the cage. Raising the temperature helps the breeding cycle but it can take from two months to a year before the nymphs emerge. As the nymphs grow in size you may have to provide extra accommodation in order to avoid overcrowding. Rearing males at cooler temperatures (15 to 20°C) may help achieve mature specimens of both sexes at the same time.