

WALNUT CREEK SUPPLY

THE COMPLETE CARE GUIDE

Tarantula

A look-don't-touch pet for patient keepers



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New owner? Go straight to Section 1. It is written so you can set up a safe, correct home and get through the first 48 hours without reading anything else first.

*A tarantula is a pet you watch rather than pet, and for the right keeper that is exactly the appeal. Picture a palm-sized, gentle-moving spider that spends its days tucked into a burrow, ventures out at dusk to ambush a cricket, and then retreats again with the unhurried confidence of an animal that has been doing this for millions of years. A female of the right species can live **15 to 25 years or more**, making her one of the longest-lived pets you can keep. This guide is written for calm, patient people who want a fascinating **look-don't-touch display pet**, and it sticks to beginner species. We'll tell you plainly which tarantulas to avoid, what the real risks are, and how to build a home so thoughtful that your spider rarely feels the need to be anything but relaxed. Read the Quick Start first, and keep the hide in mind all the way through: a secure hiding spot is the most important thing in this guide.*

SECTION 1

Quick Start: Your First 48 Hours

1. **Set up the complete enclosure before your tarantula arrives.** For an adult **terrestrial** (ground-dwelling) species you want a floor area roughly **three times the spider's leg span long and twice the leg span wide**, with the open height above the substrate only about **one leg span**. Low and wide beats tall and narrow, because a fall from even a short height can rupture a tarantula's abdomen. A typical adult beginner species fits comfortably in a ventilated box about 12 to 18 inches long.
2. **Fill it with 3 to 5 inches of damp-not-wet substrate.** Plain coco fiber or a peat-and-coco blend is the right material. Tarantulas of the beginner species like to burrow, and deep substrate gives them that option while also cushioning any tumble. Pre-moisten it until it clumps when squeezed and no water drips out.
3. **Anchor the hide before anything else goes in.** Bury a half-log, a curved piece of cork bark or a half-buried clay pot into the substrate so it cannot slide or tip, and pack the substrate firmly around its edges. This is the tarantula's front door and bedroom in one, and it is the most important piece of furniture you will buy. If you want to give your spider a head start, press a pencil into the substrate against the hide at a shallow angle to make a starter burrow tunnel.
4. **Add a shallow water dish and make sure the spider can climb out of it.** A low, wide dish sunk level with the substrate surface works well. Fill it with fresh, dechlorinated or bottled water. A pebble or two inside makes a safe landing for any insect that wanders in, and keeps a small tarantula from slipping.
5. **Check the two numbers.** Room temperature of **70 to 80°F** is ideal, and in most homes you do not need a heat source at all. Humidity should sit around **50 to 65%**. Confirm both with a digital thermometer and hygrometer before the animal goes in, not after.
6. **Secure the lid, then test it.** Press along every edge. Use clips, a locking latch or a tight screw-on fit. Tarantulas are surprisingly good at finding gaps, and an escaped tarantula can be lost in a house for weeks. Escaped animals cannot survive long outside their enclosure, since they dry out quickly and have no way to find water or food. Keep the lid shut at all times.
7. **Move your tarantula in gently and then leave it alone.** Do not pick it up with your hands. Open the shipping container inside the enclosure, or coax the spider into a clear catch cup with a soft paintbrush, and lower it to substrate level beside the hide entrance. Walk away. Plan on **48 hours without feeding, handling or rearranging**.
8. **Keep the room chemical-free.** Aerosol sprays, air fresheners, plug-in scents, bug spray, flea treatments, scented candles, cleaning mists and smoke are all dangerous to invertebrates. Use only a damp cloth with plain water near the enclosure, and never spray anything in the same room.
9. **Wash your hands before and after contact with the enclosure.** This protects the tarantula from anything on your skin, and it protects you from **urticating hairs** (tiny irritating hairs a New World tarantula flicks off its abdomen as a defense) and substrate dust. Make it a habit from day one.

10. **Line up your safety net.** Find an exotic-animal vet or an experienced local keeper before you need one. Exotic vet care for spiders is limited, so write the number on a sticky note by the enclosure.

First-Time Starter Bundle

What needs to be in the house on day one, and what to look for in each category.

Essentials

- **A low, secure, well-ventilated enclosure sized to the spider's leg span** — floor space roughly three times the leg span long and twice the leg span wide, with open height above the substrate of about one leg span. Choose a model with a lid that clips, latches or screws down, and with ventilation placed high enough that the substrate does not spill out through it. Plain plastic or glass with fine air-hole ventilation both work.
- **Coco fiber or a peat-and-coco substrate blend** — a bagged, additive-free, pesticide-free product, enough to fill the enclosure 3 to 5 inches deep, plus a little spare to top up as it compacts.
- **An anchored hide** — a half-log, a curved cork bark piece or a half-buried clay pot, sized so the tarantula can enter, turn around and have a body-width of space around it. Buy this first and choose it with care.
- **A shallow water dish** — wide, low and stable. Ceramic or heavy plastic keeps it from tipping.
- **A digital thermometer and a digital hygrometer** — a real reading beats a guess. A probe-style device that sits near substrate level is more useful than a stick-on strip.
- **Long, soft-tipped feeding tongs or forceps** — keeps your hand away from the spider at feeding time, and lets you drop prey right in front of the hide.
- **A supply of appropriately sized feeder insects** — crickets, dubia roaches or mealworms matched to your tarantula's current size, kept in a ventilated container with gut-loading food.
- **A clear catch cup with a lid, and a soft paintbrush** — the safe way to move a tarantula without touching it. A cup and brush also double as your emergency escape kit.
- **A small notebook or phone note** — a simple feeding, molt and refusal log. When a tarantula stops eating for six weeks, you will be very glad you wrote down the date of the last molt.

Ready to set up? Browse the essentials in our collections: [Reptile and Amphibian Enclosures](#) and [Reptile and Amphibian Terrarium Supplies & Accessories](#).

Enrichment

- **A second hide or a flat cork bark slab** — more than one hiding choice lets the tarantula pick its preferred burrow site and shifts the sense of security from "one hole" to "a territory."
- **A patch of sphagnum moss** — placed at one corner, it holds a pocket of moisture and gives the spider a damp retreat during **premolt** (the weeks before a molt) or hot weather without making the whole enclosure wet.
- **Dried leaf litter from a trusted supplier** — never collected from your yard, where pesticide residue is a risk. A scattering adds cover, texture and a more natural look.
- **A cork tube or a curved bark arch** — adds visual interest and a second shelter, and often becomes a favorite webbed-in sitting spot.
- **A dark background or paper wrap on three sides** — takes away the glass-box feeling and reduces startle events from movement outside the enclosure.

SECTION 2

Meet Your Tarantula

Tarantulas are large, hairy spiders in the family Theraphosidae, with well over a thousand species worldwide. They are ambush hunters: most spend their days in a burrow or under cover and come out at night to wait for something edible to walk past. They use silk to line burrows and to build a protective **molt mat** (a silk pad they lie on when shedding), not to catch prey.

Before choosing a species, it helps to understand a few terms you'll see throughout this guide and on every seller's listing.

Terrestrial, arboreal and fossorial describe where a tarantula lives. A **terrestrial** tarantula lives on or in the ground, often in a shallow burrow or under a log. An **arboreal** tarantula lives in trees and needs tall enclosures with climbing space. A **fossorial** tarantula is a committed digger that lives deep in a burrow and rarely comes up. All the species we recommend here are terrestrial, and some are semi-fossorial, meaning they dig readily when given the substrate.

New World and Old World describe where the species comes from. New World tarantulas come from the Americas and have **urticating hairs**: tiny, barbed hairs on the abdomen that the spider flicks off with its back legs as a defense. They are irritating to skin, eyes and airways but are not a venom. Old World tarantulas come from Africa, Asia and Europe, do not have urticating hairs, and instead tend to be faster, more defensive and more willing to bite, with venom that can be medically significant.

Beginners should choose a New World, terrestrial, calm species.

A **spiderling** (or "sling") is a baby tarantula, tiny and fragile, usually a half-inch to an inch in body size. A **juvenile** is a young tarantula between spiderling and adult. A tarantula grows by **molting**, which means shedding its **exoskeleton**, the hard outer shell that does the job a skeleton does inside our bodies. We cover molting in full later in this guide.

Beginner species at a glance

Species	Common name(s)	Adult leg span	Typical female lifespan	Temperament	Notes
<i>Grammostola rosea</i>	Chilean rose, rose hair	5–6 inches	15–20+ years, some to 25	Calm, slow, famously placid	Hardy and forgiving; can fast for months, which alarms new keepers; mildly flicks hairs
<i>Brachypelma hamorii</i> and relatives (<i>B. smithi</i> , <i>B. emilia</i> , <i>B. boehmei</i> , <i>B. albiceps</i>)	Mexican red knee and relatives (Mexican red leg, fireleg, golden red rump)	5–6 inches	20–25+ years	Docile, slow-moving	Striking colors; slow-growing; heavy hair flicker; always buy captive-bred
<i>Tliltocatl albopilosus</i>	Curly hair	5–5.5 inches	12–20 years	Calm but active and curious	Hardy, fast-growing, forgiving of mistakes; easily recognized by its curly golden hair; flicks hairs readily
<i>Grammostola pulchra</i>	Brazilian black	6–7 inches	15–20+ years	Docile, among the gentlest	Velvety black; slow-growing; sturdy and calm; can be shy and spend long periods in the burrow
<i>Eupalaestrus campestratus</i>	Pink zebra beauty	5–6 inches	15–20 years	Calm, sometimes skittish when startled	Pretty leg stripes; usually stays hidden; needs patient keeping

Note on names: scientific names of tarantulas change fairly often as researchers sort out the family tree. You may see *Brachypelma smithi* on older listings (now generally split into *B. hamorii* and related species) and *Tliltocatl albopilosus* listed as *Brachypelma albopilosum*. The animals haven't changed, only the labels. Ask the seller for the scientific name and the hatch or capture-bred status before you buy.

Buy captive-bred. Many tarantulas, including every *Brachypelma*, are protected under international trade rules because wild populations were harmed by collection. A captive-bred animal is healthier, usually free of parasites, and a far better choice for your conscience. Never collect a tarantula from the wild, and never release a pet into the wild. A released tarantula will not survive, and it can disturb local ecosystems.

Species to avoid as a first tarantula

Tarantulas are not all the same, and the species that make good pets are only a small fraction of the group. **Please do not choose any of the following as your first tarantula**, however beautiful or exciting they look in photos:

- ***Poecilotheria* (ornamental or pinktoe-style tree spiders).** Arboreal, extremely fast, defensive, and carry venom that can cause painful, lasting symptoms. These are advanced keepers' animals only.
- ***Haplopelma* and *Cyriopagopus* (Asian burrowers, such as cobalt blue and Thai black types).** Old World, fast, defensive, with potent venom. They are also fossorial, meaning you will see them rarely.
- ***Pterinochilus* (baboon tarantulas).** Old World, famously quick to threaten and bite, with a venom that causes significant pain and cramping.
- ***Heteropoda* and other Old World or huntsman-type species** such as *Ceratogyrus*, *Harpactira*, *Chilobrachys* and *Stromatopelma*, and any species described as "defensive," "skittish," "bitey" or "for experienced keepers."
- **Fast New World species** including many *Psalmopoeus* (arboreal, quick) and *Avicularia* (arboreal, jumpy, fragile). Lovely animals, but not beginner animals.

If a seller recommends any of these to a first-time keeper, find a different seller.

Lifespan: a long commitment for the female

How long your tarantula lives depends heavily on sex. **A female beginner-species tarantula commonly lives 15 to 25 years or more.** Chilean roses regularly reach 15 to 20, with some pushing 25, and Mexican red knees can run even longer. **A male lives a much shorter time.** Once a male reaches maturity, which can take 3 to 7 years depending on species and feeding, he usually lives only about 3 to 7 more years, and often less. In other words, a male might be a 10-year pet, and a female might be a 25-year pet.

This matters when you buy. If you want a very long-term companion, ask the seller for a **sexed female**. Tarantulas can be sexed reliably by examining a shed skin (the molted exoskeleton) under magnification, or by an experienced seller looking at a larger animal. Young spiderlings can't be sexed visually, so a very small tarantula is a lottery ticket. If you are fine with a shorter commitment, a male is still a charming, fully worthwhile pet. Either way, think of a tarantula as a long-term responsibility that may well outlast your next two or three moves.

Safety framing: what you are actually signing up for

Tarantulas are not aggressive in the way a barking dog can be, and they are not inclined to chase or attack people. They are, however, wild animals with defenses. Here are the facts as we see them.

Bites are rare but possible. A tarantula will usually flee, flick hairs or rear up in a threat pose first. Bites from beginner New World species are generally compared to a bee sting, but reactions vary, and anyone with a sting allergy, spreading swelling or trouble breathing should see a doctor.

Urticating hairs are the more common problem. They can cause itching and rash on skin, serious inflammation in the eyes, and irritation if breathed in. Wash your hands after any enclosure contact, never touch your face while working near the enclosure, and

never blow on a tarantula, which startles it into flicking hairs at your face. Handling and first-aid details are in the Handling & Safety section.

Falls can be fatal. A tarantula's abdomen is soft and full of fluid. A drop from even a short height onto a hard surface can split it open, and that is often fatal. This is why we keep enclosures low, why we do not recommend handling, and why we never work with the animal above a hard floor.

Escapes can be fatal for the tarantula. An escaped animal can hide in a house for days or weeks and will not survive long without humidity and food. Secure lids are the rule.

Chemicals are fatal. Aerosols, bug sprays and household cleaners drift in air and are highly toxic to invertebrates. A tarantula can be harmed by what you spray in the next room.

Behavior: what a calm tarantula actually does

A healthy beginner-species tarantula spends most of its life **doing nothing at all**, and that is the normal, content state. Expect to see it sitting in or near the hide, sometimes with its legs neatly tucked, sometimes stretched out at the burrow mouth waiting for something to walk by. It may emerge in the evening to wander, drink, rearrange substrate or hunt. Some days you will see nothing but the back legs poking out of the hide, and some weeks you will see nothing at all.

Tarantulas do not get lonely or affectionate the way a mammal does. They respond to the environment, not to their keeper. What we call "tame" is really just "calm," and calm comes from a snug hide, steady conditions and plenty of dark and quiet. **A relaxed tarantula** moves slowly, tucks its legs loosely, spends time in the burrow, feeds readily when hungry and grooms its feet and fangs after a meal. **A stressed tarantula** moves in fast, jerky bursts, rears up on its back legs with fangs showing (the threat pose), turns its back to flick hairs, or paces the walls looking for an exit.

What surprises new owners

Three things catch most first-time tarantula keepers off guard. The first is **how little the animal seems to do**. A new owner who expects a daily show is quickly reminded that this is a patient pet, with glimpses of activity a few evenings a week. The second is **how long a tarantula can go without eating**. A tarantula refusing food for weeks, or even months, can look like a crisis, but it is usually a normal pause, especially before a molt. The third is **how fragile the animal is**. A creature that looks like a tough, tank-like predator is in fact soft-bodied and easily injured by a fall, a cricket left behind or a spray of household cleaner. Handle that fragility with respect and your spider will reward you with decades of quiet company.

SECTION 3

Enclosure Setup & Layout

Why the hide is the heart of the setup

If you remember only one idea from this guide, make it this one: **a tarantula without a proper hide is an unhappy tarantula**. A hide is more than a decoration. It does five jobs at once.

It does five jobs at once. It gives the spider **security**, because a tarantula with nowhere to retreat is in constant low-level alarm. It creates a **microclimate**, since the air and substrate under a hide hold moisture longer and buffer the spider against dry room air. It **shapes behavior**: spiders with a good hide come out to hunt and explore on their own schedule, while spiders without one pace the walls and rear up defensively. It supports **molting**, because a protected molt site is the difference between a clean molt and a failed one. And it anchors a **burrow**, since most beginner species dig under and beside the hide and turn it into a tunnel.

A good hide is **anchored** (so it cannot shift, tip or collapse onto the spider), **sized correctly** (snug enough to feel enclosed, roomy enough to turn around), and **placed against a wall or in a corner** (so the spider feels backed up). Half-logs, curved cork bark and half-buried clay pots all work well. For juvenile and smaller animals, a hide can be a simple piece of cork bark propped at an angle with the substrate firmly built up around it.

Sizing the enclosure to the leg span

A tarantula's **leg span** is the distance from the tip of one front leg to the tip of the opposite back leg when the animal is stretched out. Terrestrial enclosures are sized from this measurement, not from gallons.

Measurement	Rule of thumb	Example for a 5-inch leg span
Floor length	About 3× the leg span	About 15 inches
Floor width	About 2× the leg span	About 10 inches
Open height above the substrate surface	About 1× the leg span	About 5 inches
Substrate depth	3–5 inches	4 inches
Total interior height of the box	Substrate depth plus open height	About 9–10 inches

The very low height is intentional. A tarantula that climbs to the lid and falls can rupture its abdomen, so a low enclosure keeps the drop short, and the deep substrate underneath cushions any landing. If you end up with a taller box, fill it with more substrate to bring the usable height down.

Growing up: the enclosure progression

Life stage	Approximate body size	Enclosure	Notes
Spiderling	Under 1 inch	Small ventilated container or vial, about 3–4 inches across	1–2 inches of moist substrate and a tiny hide piece; check for escapes daily
Small juvenile	1–2 inches	Container about 6×4 inches or similar	Add a hide; keep substrate evenly damp on one side
Large juvenile	2–3 inches	Container about 8×6 inches	Increase substrate depth to 3 inches
Sub-adult and adult	3 inches and up	Enclosure sized to the leg span, about 12–18 inches long	Substrate 3–5 inches; this is the long-term home

Don't over-house a small tarantula. A spiderling in a large enclosure has trouble finding its food, struggles to maintain humidity and can feel exposed. Match the container to the animal and move up in stages as it grows.

The labeled layout

If you were to draw your tarantula's home as a cutaway diagram, here is how it should be labeled, from the top down and the front left to the back right.

A. Secure ventilated lid. The roof of the enclosure. It clips or locks shut on every side, and it has fine ventilation holes or a mesh section that is escape-proof. Ventilation should be cross-flow where possible: a small amount on the lid and a small amount on an upper side wall, never so large that the substrate dries out.

B. Open air space. Roughly one leg span of empty space above the surface of the substrate. Nothing tall or climbable should be in here. No branches, no high perches, nothing that invites a climb and a fall.

C. Substrate surface. Level, slightly bumpy and clean. A mix of smooth patches and gentle mounds where the spider has been digging. The substrate surface should not be wet.

D. Anchored hide. Placed against the back wall or in a back corner, with its entrance facing the open floor. The hide's far edge is buried into the substrate, and the substrate is firmly packed beside it. A starter burrow tunnel can run beneath or beside it.

E. Burrow zone, 3 to 5 inches of substrate. The deep layer beneath everything. The tarantula can dig down into this, and its lower layers hold gentle moisture even when the surface is dry.

F. Water dish. Placed in the front corner on the opposite side to the hide, sunk level with the substrate surface so the spider can walk in and out without a step. Shallow, wide, stable and refilled with fresh water when needed.

G. Damp corner. On the same side as the water dish, the substrate is poured with a little water along the wall once a week to keep a gentle moisture gradient. The opposite side stays drier. The spider can choose.

H. Dark background. Three sides covered with paper or a dark wrap so the spider feels sheltered from movement outside the glass.

I. Thermometer and hygrometer. Mounted near the substrate surface on the wall, away from the water dish and any direct sunlight.

Where to put the enclosure, and lighting

Pick a quiet, stable spot with steady room temperature on a low, sturdy surface, away from direct sun (a closed box becomes an oven within minutes), windowsills, vents, drafts, kitchens and bathrooms. Keep it out of reach of children, cats and dogs, but where you can see it easily. **Tarantulas need no special lighting:** no UVB, no basking bulb, no heat lamp. The room's normal day and night pattern is plenty.

SECTION 4

Substrate Guide

Substrate does more than line the floor. For a burrowing tarantula it is the building material for its home, the cushion for any tumble, and the reservoir that holds steady moisture. Aim for **3 to 5 inches**, packed lightly so a burrow will hold its shape.

Substrate	Best for	Performance	Notes
Coco fiber (coir), plain	All beginner species, all ages	Holds burrows well, holds moisture without going sour, low dust	Buy additive-free; pre-moisten until it clumps without dripping; the first choice for most keepers
Peat and coco blend (roughly half and half)	Species that like slightly firmer, drier burrows	Packs well for tunnels; holds moisture longer than coco alone	Choose plain peat with no fertilizer or wetting agents
Pesticide-free, fertilizer-free plain topsoil mixed with coco	Experienced keepers who want a natural look	Excellent burrowing; natural feel	Must be labeled plain and free of fertilizer, perlite beads and additives; check the bag carefully
Sphagnum moss (a patch only)	Moisture corner, premolt retreat	Holds water in one pocket without wetting the whole box	Use as an accent in one corner, not as the main floor
Paper towel	Spiderling quarantine, emergency housing	Easy to monitor, fully disposable	Not suitable long-term; spiders cannot burrow
Fine play sand alone	Avoid	Dry sand collapses burrows and offers no cushion	Only ever a small mixed-in share
Cedar or aromatic pine shavings	Never	Aromatic oils are toxic to invertebrates	No safe use case
Gravel, bark chunks, walnut shell	Avoid	Hard, sharp and abrasive; injury risk on a fall	Not appropriate at any age
Potting soil with fertilizer or pesticide, yard soil, wild-collected leaf litter or mulch	Never	Chemicals, mites and parasites harm or kill tarantulas	Check every label; use only supplier-bought material
Calcium sand, reptile carpet, loose cat litter	Avoid outright	Dusty, abrasive or chemically treated	Remove from any setup immediately

Setting up and maintaining the substrate

Moisten the substrate with plain dechlorinated water in a tub before you add it, stirring until it holds together in a squeezed handful with no drip. Pack it in lightly, build it up against the hide, and leave the surface a little uneven. **Spot-clean** the droppings (a small whitish-and-black splat) and any prey remains with tongs as soon as you see them. A full substrate change is only needed every 6 to 12 months, or sooner after mold, mites or a spill. Between times, top it up as it compacts and keep it evenly damp at the bottom with a slow pour along one wall, never a spritz over the whole surface.

SECTION 5

Temperature & Humidity — The 2 Numbers

Beginner tarantulas are among the least demanding pets when it comes to climate. Two numbers do almost all the work: **room-range warmth** and **moderate humidity**. Get those right and you can leave the heat lamps and mist bottles in the shop.

Parameter	Target	How to measure it	What goes wrong when it's off
Temperature	70–80°F (room temperature is usually perfect)	Digital thermometer with a probe at substrate level; double-check on a cold night in winter	Below about 65°F: appetite and activity drop, digestion slows, and molting drags on; above about 85°F: dehydration and stress; above 90°F: dangerous
Humidity	About 50–65% (rose hair 50–60%; leaning drier for arid-leaning species)	Digital hygrometer at mid-height on the wall, away from the water dish	Below about 45%: dehydration, curled legs, difficult molts; above about 70% with poor airflow: mold, mites and bacterial growth

Temperature without heating gear

Do not use heat lamps, heat rocks or under-tank heat mats for a beginner tarantula. Lamps dry out substrate and can overheat a small box; heat mats burn burrowing animals that dig down toward the heat. If your home regularly drops below 68°F, warm the whole room slightly or move the enclosure to a steadier spot. An overall gentle warmth beats a hot spot every time.

Humidity without soaking

Most new keepers get this wrong in the wet direction. A tarantula's enclosure is not a rainforest. Aim for a **dry surface and gently moist depth**, and let the numbers come from these habits:

- Keep a full shallow **water dish** at all times. Evaporation alone holds ambient humidity in range for most homes.
- Once a week, pour a small amount of water **along one wall** or into one corner, so one side of the substrate is damp and the other stays dry. The tarantula picks its preferred zone.
- **Do not mist the spider** directly. It frightens them, can trigger a hair flick, and soaks the animal needlessly.
- **Provide cross-ventilation.** Still, damp air is the real cause of mold and mites. Good airflow keeps humidity comfortable without drying the substrate.

Species vary slightly. The Chilean rose does best on the drier end of the range, while Mexican red knees, curly hairs, Brazilian blacks and pink zebra beauties are comfortable towards the middle. When in doubt, stay inside the 50 to 65% range, keep the water dish full and watch the spider.

SECTION 6

Diet & Nutrition



Prey no larger than the tarantula's body, offered every week or two. Remove uneaten prey within a day, and never feed wild-caught insects.

Tarantulas are **strict carnivores** that eat living insects. They sit and wait, feel a vibration, pounce, and inject digestive fluid that dissolves the prey from inside before they drink it. What is left is a small, compact ball of indigestible bits, called a **bolus**. Feeding is the most fun part of keeping a tarantula, and also where most beginners overdo things. A healthy adult tarantula needs far less food than you would think.

Feeders that work

Feeder	Best for	Why it works	Notes
Crickets (house or banded)	Juveniles through adults	Easy to find; active prey triggers a feeding response	Keep well fed and watered; remove uneaten crickets promptly because they chew on molting spiders
Dubia roaches	Juveniles through adults	Meaty, nutritious, climb poorly, hard to escape, quiet	Many keepers' first choice; a small colony at home supplies food cheaply
Mealworms	Juveniles and smaller adults	Easy to store, slow-moving, tough exoskeleton	Burrow into substrate if not eaten, so remove any survivors; best as a supporting feeder

Feeder	Best for	Why it works	Notes
Superworms	Large adults only	Big, meaty and satisfying	Can bite back and burrow; crush the head before offering; remove uneaten worms quickly
Waxworms or hornworms	Occasional treat only	Soft and fatty, or hydrating	Very rich; a rare treat, not a staple
Fruit flies, pinhead crickets, tiny roaches	Spiderlings	Correct size for tiny mouths	Offer in small quantities and remove leftovers

Gut-load every feeder. Gut-loading means feeding the prey well before you feed it to your tarantula, so what is inside the insect is what ends up in your pet. Give crickets and roaches oats, fresh greens, carrot or orange slices and a commercial gut-load for 24 to 48 hours beforehand. It is the invertebrate version of "clean fuel, no junk."

How big should the prey be?

Rule of thumb: prey no larger than the tarantula's body (the abdomen plus the carapace, not counting legs). For most tarantulas, a prey item about half the size of the abdomen up to the full body length is perfect. A cricket that is too big can fight back, hurt the spider, or simply be ignored.

Feeding schedule by age

Life stage	Approximate size	How often	How much
Spiderling	Under 1 inch	Every 3–5 days	1 appropriately tiny prey item
Juvenile	1–3 inches	Every 4–7 days	1–2 items, no larger than the body
Sub-adult	3–4 inches	Every 7–10 days	2–3 medium items
Adult female	4 inches and up	Every 1–2 weeks, or less	2–3 items, or 1 large item; many females eat less often
Adult male (after his final molt)	Mature	Often eats very little	Offer only occasionally; males frequently stop eating

These are starting points. The best guide is the **abdomen**. A round, plump abdomen no wider than the carapace is ideal. A shrunk, wrinkled abdomen means the spider needs water and food. A greatly swollen abdomen larger than the carapace means you are overfeeding.

How to feed

1. Use tongs or forceps to place the prey a few inches in front of the hide, at the front of the enclosure floor.
2. Back away and watch quietly. Many feedings happen overnight, so do not hover.
3. **Remove any uneaten prey within 24 hours.** A live cricket left behind can chew on the tarantula, especially when it is molting.
4. Remove the bolus and any dead insects as you spot them.
5. Log the date, the prey and whether it was eaten.

Never feed

- **Wild-caught insects.** They can carry pesticides, parasites and diseases. This is not worth the risk, ever.

- **Anything glowing or foul-tasting.** Fireflies and other chemically defended insects can be toxic.
- **Prey larger than the tarantula's body.**
- **Dead prey that has been sitting around.** It breeds mold and bacteria.
- **Human food, pet food or dairy.** Tarantulas eat live prey, and nothing else belongs in the box.
- **Vertebrates such as pinky mice, as a routine food.** They are unnecessary and messy, and they carry a risk of rot and bacteria.
- **Insects from a kitchen, a garden shed or a bait shop with unknown treatment.** If you can't be sure where it came from, don't use it.

Fasting is normal

A tarantula that refuses food is usually a healthy tarantula. Healthy adults, especially Chilean roses and mature females, can refuse food for weeks to months without harm. The most common reasons are premolt, cool temperatures and being well fed already. If the spider is alert, the abdomen is plump, and there are no other red flags, remove the prey, keep the water dish full, and try again in a week or two. Do not force food. See "Why is my tarantula not eating?" in the FAQ and the dehydration entry under Common Challenges for the signs that mean the fast is a problem.

Hydration

Always keep a **clean, shallow water dish** in the enclosure, refilled whenever it is low or dirty and washed monthly with plain hot water. Tarantulas drink by dipping their mouthparts, and the dish also supports humidity.

Shop the food and supplies: Browse Live Feed Delivered!.

SECTION 7

Molting & Growth

A tarantula's exoskeleton cannot stretch, so to grow it must shed the old one and emerge in a new, larger one. This is called a **molt**, and it is the most vulnerable moment of a tarantula's life. Spiderlings molt every few weeks, juveniles every two to four months, and adult females about once a year or even less. Mature males stop molting after their final "maturity" molt.

Premolt: the warning signs

The weeks leading up to a molt are called **premolt**. Look for:

- Refusing food, often for weeks or more
- Reduced activity and long periods in the hide
- A darker, shiny or dull-looking abdomen, and a bald patch that darkens
- Duller colors overall, with the carapace looking faded
- Silk webbing thickening at the hide, or the burrow entrance getting sealed shut
- A spider that seems oddly restless or oddly still

When you see these, **stop offering food, remove any prey in the enclosure, keep the water dish full and keep humidity steady**. Do not increase humidity dramatically and do not start misting.

The molt, step by step

1. **The spider builds a silk molt mat** in or near the hide and settles on it. Leave it entirely alone.
2. **It rolls onto its back or side**, with legs curled in. To a new keeper it looks dead. **It is not**. Do not flip it, nudge it, or "help" it.
3. **The carapace lifts away** from the body along seams, and over the next hours the spider slowly pulls itself and its legs out of the old skin. A small spiderling may finish in an hour; a big adult can take most of a day.
4. **The new tarantula is soft, pale and fragile**. It rests on the mat for hours to days while the new exoskeleton hardens. Its fangs are soft too, and they cannot safely handle prey yet.
5. **Leave the cast-off skin (the exuvia) in place** for a day or two, then remove it with tongs. Keep it: it is the best tool for sexing your tarantula under a magnifier.
6. **Wait 7 days or more after the molt before offering any food**, and longer for larger adults (often two weeks or more), to give the fangs time to harden. Offer a small first meal.

What not to do during a molt

- **Do not touch, move or flip the spider.**
- **Do not offer prey.** A cricket left in the enclosure can seriously injure a molting tarantula.
- **Do not mist, spray or flood the enclosure.**
- **Do not "help" pull legs out of the old skin.** Pulling can tear limbs.
- **Do not panic if it lies there for a day or more.** Wait and watch quietly. Worry only if there is a foul smell, visible mold, or a molt that has stalled for more than 24 to 48 hours with no progress. If so, see Common Challenges.

SECTION 8

Common Challenges & Solutions

Dehydration

What you see: curled-in legs, a shrunken or wrinkled abdomen, lethargy, sometimes a spider sitting on or beside the water dish. **Why:** the water dish ran dry, the room air is very dry, or the substrate has dried out completely. **What to do:** refill the dish with fresh water and dampen one side of the substrate. Do not flood. Recheck humidity and bring it back toward 50 to 65%. **When to ask for help:** if the spider is still limp and shrivelled after 24 to 48 hours of corrected conditions.

Failed or stuck molt

What you see: a spider stuck partway in its old skin for more than a day, or one that is fully out but with legs, fangs or the abdomen deformed. **Why:** humidity too low, a disturbance mid-molt, dehydration or an interrupted molt. **What to do:** leave it alone, keep the water dish full and make sure humidity is in the middle of the range. Never pull at the old skin. **When to ask for help:** immediately if the spider is stuck for more than 24 hours. Contact an experienced keeper or exotic vet.

Falls and abdominal rupture

What you see: clear or pale fluid (hemolymph) leaking from the abdomen, a dented or collapsed abdomen, or a spider that seems limp after a drop. **Why:** a climb-and-fall from the lid or a decoration, a drop during handling or a bad rehousing. **What to do:** keep the spider on its own in a quiet, dim, slightly humid, low box with a very shallow dish of water. Do not touch the wound. Some small ruptures can close and heal over a molt. **When to ask for help:** immediately, because large ruptures are often fatal. Contact an exotic vet or experienced keeper today.

Mites

What you see: tiny whitish or tan specks that move, clustered on the spider, on old prey or on damp substrate. **Why:** mites ride in on feeder insects, substrate or décor and thrive in warm, wet, still conditions. **What to do:** remove all uneaten prey, replace the soiled substrate, let the box dry, improve ventilation and never use sprays or pesticides. Many mites are harmless scavengers, so a few on the substrate are not alarming. **When to ask for help:** if mites cluster on the spider's body, mouth or leg joints, or the spider seems irritated.

Parasitic nematodes

What you see: weight loss in an animal that seems to be eating, lethargy, a "ropey" white discharge or smear around the mouth, and a drawn-in abdomen. **Why:** microscopic worm parasites, more common in wild-caught animals or ones kept in dirty, wet conditions. **What to do:** keep the enclosure very clean, do not guess at treatments, and contact a vet. **When to ask for help:** as soon as you see discharge or steady weight loss. A vet can confirm with a sample.

Bald patches (usually normal)

What you see: a bare, shiny patch on the top of the abdomen. **Why:** the spider kicked off urticating hairs, which is a normal defense, and the patch grows back after the next molt. A darker bald patch can also be a premolt sign. **What to do:** nothing. Keep the spider calm and avoid whatever caused the kicking. **When to ask for help:** only if the skin underneath looks broken, leaks fluid or looks infected.

Dyskinetic syndrome (DKS)

What you see: tremors, twitching, jerky or uncoordinated walking, the spider falling over, or a flailing leg that can't grip. **Why:** DKS (dyskinetic syndrome) is not fully understood. It is often linked to chemical exposure, but may have other causes. **What to do:** remove every possible chemical source, ventilate the room, keep the enclosure quiet and dim, and keep a very shallow dish of

water in reach. **When to ask for help:** immediately. DKS is often fatal and the best help is an experienced keeper or exotic vet.

Chemical exposure

What you see: sudden lethargy, tremors, a spider on its back or stuck to the wall, unusual twitching, or refusing to move after cleaning, spraying, painting or pest treatment. **Why:** invertebrates absorb airborne toxins quickly. Bug spray, cleaning aerosols, air freshener, flea products, smoke, vapour and fumes are all harmful. **What to do:** move the enclosure to fresh air, ventilate the room, stop all aerosols and wash your hands before touching the box. **When to ask for help:** immediately if symptoms appear.

Overfeeding

What you see: an abdomen visibly bigger than the carapace, often shiny and tight. **Why:** feeding too often, or too much per meal. A heavy abdomen is more likely to split in a fall or during a molt. **What to do:** reduce feeding frequency and prey size; do not "diet" abruptly, just space meals out. **When to ask for help:** if the abdomen looks tight, split or leaking.

Injuries from prey left in the enclosure

What you see: chew marks, missing leg tips, wounds, or a worried spider that stays out of its hide. **Why:** uneaten crickets and superworms can nibble on a tarantula, particularly one that is molting or in premolt. **What to do:** always remove uneaten prey within 24 hours, and sooner in premolt. **When to ask for help:** if a wound leaks fluid or a leg is missing a large piece. Many small injuries heal over a molt.

Mold and a too-wet enclosure

What you see: fuzzy white, gray or green patches on substrate, a sour smell, condensation on the walls or springtails and flies everywhere. **Why:** too much moisture and not enough airflow. **What to do:** remove the affected substrate, let the box dry out, add ventilation and water only along one wall. **When to ask for help:** if the spider sits in damp mold or becomes unresponsive.

Escape

What you see: an empty enclosure or a lid that is slightly ajar. **Why:** a loose lid, a gap in the ventilation or a lid left open at feeding time. **What to do:** stay calm and do not chase or grab. Search low and dark: behind furniture, under appliances and along baseboards, with a flashlight. Use a cup and a soft brush to guide it into a container. Put a damp, shallow dish in the room and search again at dusk. **When to ask for help:** if the spider has been out for more than a few days, or has been injured.

Quick reference

What you see	Likely cause	What to do	Urgency
Curled legs, shrunken abdomen	Dehydration	Refill dish; dampen one side	Ask for help if no recovery in 48 hours
Stuck in old skin	Failed molt	Leave alone; steady humidity	Same day if over 24 hours
Leaking fluid	Fall rupture	Quiet low box; no handling	Same day
Moving specks	Mites	Clean, dry, ventilate	If clustering on the spider
White mouth discharge, weight loss	Nematodes	Keep clean; see vet	Soon
Bare patch on abdomen	Hair kicked off	None	Only if skin is broken
Tremors, uncoordinated	DKS or chemicals	Remove toxins; quiet	Immediately
Tight, shiny abdomen	Overfeeding	Space out meals	If split or leaking
Mold, sour smell	Too wet	Dry, vent, replace	If spider is unwell

SECTION 9

Handling & Safety

Why we say hands-off

A tarantula does not need to be held to be happy, and nothing about handling benefits the animal. The spider cannot be trained to enjoy it. A tarantula is a very fast mover when startled, and a very fragile one when dropped. We recommend **no handling** for beginners. If a rare situation calls for it (a rehousing or an emergency), do it calmly, **low over a soft surface** such as a bed or a thick towel on the floor, or better yet, use the cup-and-brush method: set the open catch cup beside the spider, tickle it from behind with a soft paintbrush until it walks in, and slide the lid on.

Urticating hairs

The tiny hairs your New World tarantula flicks off its abdomen are barbed and designed to irritate. On skin they cause itching and a rash that can last days. In the eyes they can cause painful inflammation that needs a doctor. If inhaled, they can irritate the nose, throat and lungs. To stay safe:

- Wash your hands after any enclosure contact, and never touch your face while you work.
- Wear safety glasses when doing a substrate change or rehousing.
- **Never blow on a tarantula.** Never.
- Lift hairs off skin with sticky tape, then rinse. Flush eyes with clean water and see a doctor.
- Seek medical care for any wheezing, cough or shortness of breath.

Bites and falls

Bites from beginner species are rare and usually a last resort after warnings like rearing up and hair flicking. **Consult a doctor for any bite with a severe reaction, spreading redness, trouble breathing, or if you have a known insect-sting allergy.** A drop from even a short height can rupture the abdomen, so never work with your tarantula above a hard floor and keep the enclosure on a low, stable surface.

Children and other pets

Tarantulas make a wonderful classroom-style observation pet for curious kids, with strict rules. Children should look but not touch, and should never open the enclosure alone. Teach them to wash their hands with soap for at least 20 seconds after being near the enclosure, never to shake or tap the box, and to stay clear of the lid. Keep the enclosure out of reach of cats, dogs and toddlers, since pets can be harmed by urticating hairs and may knock the box over.

SECTION 10

Routine Care Calendar

How often	What to do
Daily	Glance at the tarantula: posture, abdomen size, alertness (without opening the lid)
Daily	Check that the lid is fully secure
Daily	Check that the water dish is clean and full
Weekly	Pour a small amount of water along one wall to keep the damp side damp
Weekly	Check thermometer and hygrometer readings
Weekly	Remove uneaten prey and any boluses; spot-clean droppings
Weekly to biweekly	Offer food as the schedule suggests (skip if premolt signs or a molt)
Monthly	Wash the water dish in plain hot water; check the hide is still anchored
Monthly	Look for mold, mites and heavy condensation; adjust ventilation
Monthly	Update the feeding and molt log
Every 3 months	Top up substrate and refresh gut-loading supplies
Every 6–12 months	Full substrate change if needed, then re-anchor the hide
Annually	Review enclosure size for the animal's growth; check lid and clips for wear
Annually	Confirm contacts for an exotic vet or experienced keeper

SECTION 11

When to Ask for Help

Tarantulas hide illness well, and exotic vet care for them is limited. If you are unsure, contact an experienced keeper or an exotic vet early. A phone call costs nothing.

Act today:

- Fluid leaking from the abdomen, or a dented, collapsed abdomen after any fall
- A molt stuck for more than 24 hours, or a spider partly out of its old skin and not progressing
- Tremors, twitching, loss of coordination, or a spider that falls over (possible DKS or chemical exposure)
- Any sign of chemical exposure: spraying, fumes or smoke near the enclosure followed by lethargy or twitching
- Severe dehydration (curled legs, shrunken abdomen) not improving within a day of corrected conditions
- White discharge or ropey smears around the mouth
- Mites crowding on the spider's body or mouthparts
- A tarantula that has escaped and cannot be found within hours

Book within a few days:

- Steady weight loss with a shrinking abdomen over several weeks, in an animal that is not in premolt
- Missing leg tips, wounds or chew marks that do not heal over a molt
- A bare patch where the skin underneath looks broken
- Persistent mold or foul smell in the enclosure

For people: **see a doctor** for any bite with a severe reaction, any eye contact with hairs, or any breathing difficulty after hair exposure.

SECTION 12

FAQ

Are tarantulas dangerous?

Beginner New World tarantulas are not aggressive and rarely bite, but they are not harmless. A bite can hurt and swell like a bee sting, and people with sting allergies should be careful. The more common problem is urticating hairs, which can cause itching, rash, painful eye irritation and airway irritation, so wash your hands after contact and never touch your face. Old World species and tree-dwelling tarantulas can be fast, defensive and medically significant, which is why we recommend only calm New World terrestrials for beginners.

How long do tarantulas live?

Females of the beginner species commonly live 15 to 25 years or more, with Chilean roses often reaching 15 to 20 and some going well beyond. Males live much shorter lives, typically only about 3 to 7 years after maturity. A female is a very long commitment, so if you want a long-term companion, ask for a sexed female.

What do tarantulas eat?

Tarantulas eat live insects. The usual feeders are crickets, dubia roaches and mealworms, with superworms for large adults. Choose prey no larger than the tarantula's body, gut-load it before feeding, and never feed wild-caught insects, which can carry pesticides and parasites. Remove any uneaten prey within 24 hours.

How often do you feed a tarantula?

Spiderlings and juveniles eat every 3 to 7 days, while adults usually eat every 1 to 2 weeks, and females often less. The abdomen is the best guide: plump but not larger than the carapace is right. Skip feeding during premolt or a molt, and wait at least 7 days after a molt before offering food.

What is the best tarantula for beginners?

The Chilean rose (*Grammostola rosea*) is the classic first tarantula because it is calm, hardy and forgiving. The Mexican red knee and its relatives, the curly hair (*Tliltocatl albopilosus*), the Brazilian black and the pink zebra beauty are also good choices. All are New World terrestrial species. Avoid Old World tarantulas, *Poecilotheria*, *Haplopetma*, *Cyriopagopus* and *Pterinochilus*, which are fast, defensive and medically significant.

Can you hold a tarantula?

We do not recommend it. Tarantulas do not enjoy handling, can bolt or kick hairs when startled, and can be fatally injured by a fall from even a short height. If handling is unavoidable, keep it calm and low over a soft surface, or use a catch cup and soft brush. Children should look but not touch.

What size enclosure does a tarantula need?

For a terrestrial species, size the floor area to the leg span: roughly three times the leg span long and twice as wide. Keep the open height above the substrate to about one leg span, to reduce fall damage. Fill the base with 3 to 5 inches of coco fiber or peat blend, and include an anchored hide, a shallow water dish and a secure ventilated lid. A typical adult beginner species fits well in a box about 12 to 18 inches long.

Do tarantulas need heat?

Usually not. Most beginner species thrive at normal room temperature of 70 to 80°F, so you do not need a heat lamp, heat rock or heat mat, and these can dry out or overheat the enclosure. Just keep the enclosure out of drafts and direct sun, and measure the

temperature with a thermometer.

Why is my tarantula not eating?

Refusing food is very common and usually harmless. The most frequent causes are premolt, cool temperatures, or being well fed already, and healthy adults can fast for weeks or even months. If the spider is alert and the abdomen is plump, remove the prey, keep the water dish full and try again later. Ask for help if the abdomen is shrunken and wrinkled, the legs are curled in, or the spider is lethargic.

What does a tarantula molt look like?

A molting tarantula often lies on its back or side on a silk mat, with its legs curled, and looks dead. It is not. Do not touch it or offer prey. The old exoskeleton splits and the spider slowly pulls itself out over a few hours, up to most of a day for big adults. Afterward it is soft and fragile, so wait at least 7 days before feeding.

Ready to shop? Start with *Reptiles & Amphibians*. 10% of every purchase supports no-kill animal shelters.

SECTION 13

Every Purchase Gives Back

Before we earn a dime, **10% of every purchase at Walnut Creek Supply goes to no-kill animal shelters across the country.** Not an option at checkout, and not a promotion. Off the top of every order, every day, because we believe caring for the animals in our homes and caring for the animals who need homes are the same promise made in two different directions.

For tarantula keepers, that promise looks like patience. You've chosen a pet that asks you to watch, wait and respect its space, and it will repay you with years of quiet fascination. If you ever find yourself unable to keep a tarantula, please do not release it. Contact a local reptile-and-invertebrate club, a rescue or the seller, who can help rehome it safely.

We're a family business in Christiana, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. We grow our own food, keep our own animals and stock the goods we'd put in front of our own pets: **no mystery ingredients, clean fuel, no junk**, and no unsafe substrates. If you have a question about your tarantula's hide, humidity, feeding schedule or a stubborn fast, call us at **(717) 983-8069**. We'd rather talk it through with you.

Welcome to 15 or more years of quiet company with one of the most remarkable animals in the hobby.

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