

Land Hermit Crab

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff



Land hermit crabs of many different species are found in tropical areas of the Indo-region, the western Atlantic, and the western Caribbean. They use their large left claws for defense, holding onto tree limbs, and balance, while the smaller right claw and next pair of appendages are used for collecting and passing food and water to the mouth. The longer pair of antennae is used for feeling, the shorter for smelling and tasting.

Species Profile: Land Hermit Crab

Scientific Name:	<i>Coenobita perlatus</i>
Average Size:	Usually 1"-3" long; can grow up to 6".
Average Life Span:	Approximately 10 years.
Appearance:	Hermit crabs are not true crabs, as they wear the shells of other animals to protect their soft abdomen. When threatened, the crab will withdraw into the shell, using its large claw to block the shell's entrance. When in motion, the crab's eyes, antennae, claws, and two sets of walking legs are visible outside of the shell.
Habitat	
Lighting:	Hermit crabs do not require special lighting. Normal room light, 10-12 hours per day, is adequate, although full-spectrum lighting may be beneficial.
Temperature:	75-85°F. Lower temperatures will cause hermit crabs to become stressed and ill. You may wish to use an under-tank heater under one side of the habitat.

Humidity: A tropical-like environment of 70-80% humidity is essential. If the humidity drops below 70%, a crab's gills can dry out and cause him to suffocate; however, too wet an environment can encourage mold growth. Use a [hygrometer](#) and check it daily.

Housing: A 10-gallon glass aquarium with a tight-fitting lid (to keep in humidity and your pet) makes an adequate starter home. The habitat should provide enough room for a [hiding shelter](#), [food and water dishes](#), extra shells, and plenty of [items to climb on](#), as well as enough free space for the crabs to roam. The small plastic containers crabs are often sold in do not provide the space, temperature or humidity requirements of healthy hermit crabs.

Substrate: Natural-colored sand and coconut fibers are ideal substrates. The substrate layer should be moist and deep enough for crabs to burrow.

Diet/Feeding: Hermit crabs are omnivorous, meaning they will eat both animal and plant matter. In the wild, they are scavengers. There are several commercially available diets for hermit crabs that can be supplemented with healthy "people food" such as vegetables, fruits, and cooked meat, as well as items high in calcium, like crushed [cuttlebones](#). Crabs are nocturnal and will eat at night, so uneaten food should be removed in the morning to keep the habitat hygienic and pest-free. All dishes should be non-metal, and shallow to prevent drowning. Dishes of both dechlorinated fresh water and salt water should be provided (use [aquarium salt](#), not table salt, which is harmful to crabs).

Behavior/Interaction: Despite their names, hermit crabs are social and are often found in large groups in the wild. Crabs should be kept in groups of at least three, preferably more. Most do not mind occasional gentle handling by humans, but be aware a frightened or startled crab can pinch.

Molting: Hermit crabs grow by molting, or shedding their exoskeletons, an average of once every 18 months. A crab may look dull in color, act lethargic, eat and drink a great deal, or dig down or bury itself in the substrate before a molt. A molting crab should be isolated from others, and kept in a separate container with a thick layer of moist sand or Eco-Earth, where it can be left undisturbed until its fresh exoskeleton hardens. He will eat his old "skin," so leave it with your crab. A crab can be returned to the group once he's

active and eating as usual. Note that a recently shed exoskeleton can be mistaken for a dead crab - check the shell carefully to be certain a crab isn't simply in the midst of molting. Never attempt to "help" a crab molt by trying to remove a partly discarded exoskeleton.

Interesting Facts:

There are hundreds of different species of hermit crabs throughout the world, living both on the ocean floor and on land. They are excellent climbers, making a tight-fitting lid on their home a must, and will often attempt to go over or dig under objects in their path rather than go around. They've also been known to communicate through chirping sounds.