

FAQs: Crickets & Mealworms

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

Many herps are insectivores, meaning that their diet consists mostly of insects from which they get their daily nutrition. In addition, many omnivorous herps need their daily diets supplemented with crickets and mealworms. Both crickets and mealworms are a great source of protein and fat, and, when kept and fed properly, can supply a number of other vital nutrients as well, such as calcium.

There are many aspects to properly using feeder insects however, and it can be quite confusing for new reptile and amphibian owners. Below we will discuss some of the main questions you may have about feeding crickets and mealworms to your herp.

- [How often should I buy crickets and mealworms?](#)
- [What temperature should I keep my crickets and mealworms at?](#)
- [What should I keep the crickets and mealworms in?](#)
- [Do I have to clean the containers I keep my crickets and mealworms in?](#)
- [What should I feed my crickets and mealworms?](#)
- [What is gutloading?](#)
- [How should I feed the crickets and mealworms to my herp?](#)
- [Why should I dust the crickets and mealworms with a calcium and vitamin powder before feeding them to my herp?](#)
- [What is the nutritional information of crickets and mealworms?](#)
- [What size crickets and mealworms should I feed my herp?](#)
- [What is the difference between mealworms and giant mealworms?](#)
- [Are waxworms and superworms different from mealworms?](#)
- [Can I feed my herp crickets that I catch?](#)

How often should I buy crickets and mealworms?

Crickets need to be purchased more frequently than mealworms. Crickets live for only eight weeks, and they are full sized adults after approximately six weeks. (Warmer temperatures can cause them to grow even faster.) Therefore, you should purchase crickets with a two week long margin of growth, and replace them approximately two weeks after they reach adult size. This must be done to ensure that your herp is getting the proper size cricket.

Mealworms can be purchased once every month or even less frequently. Storing them at fridge temperatures retards their development and prevents them from maturing into beetles, which allows you a much longer period of time in which to feed them to your herp. Cared for properly, mealworms can last up to several months. [[Back to Top](#)]

What temperature should I keep my crickets and mealworms at?

Crickets should be kept at a temperature between 75° and 85°F. Mealworms should be kept at about 45° - 50°F to prevent them from turning into beetles. [[Back to Top](#)]

What should I keep the crickets and mealworms in?

Crickets should be kept in a [plastic](#) or glass container. It should have smooth sides, good ventilation, a tight lid to prevent escape, and lots of hiding spots (e.g., paper towel tubes, egg crates, etc.) to lessen the chance of cannibalism. They do not need substrate.

Mealworms should be stored in the fridge unless you plan to breed them. They can be placed in a smooth-walled plastic or cardboard container with holes in the lid for ventilation. Place approximately 1" of [mealworm bedding](#) made from dry oatmeal, wheat bran, rolled oats, or another similar substance both under and on top of the mealworms. [[Back to Top](#)]

Do I have to clean the containers I keep my crickets and mealworms in?

You should clean your crickets' container about once a week. You don't have to clean your mealworms' container often, but you should make sure that the substrate (bedding) is always dry. Moist substrate will mold, killing off the mealworms. [[Back to Top](#)]

What should I feed my crickets and mealworms?

Crickets are omnivores, and there are many commercial [cricket diets](#) available. You can also feed them fresh vegetables, such as potatoes and carrots. They should be fed several times a week, and their diet must be supplemented with vitamins and calcium to make them more nutritious for your herps. They also need a constant water source, but they cannot be given a water dish for fear of drowning in it. A moist paper towel or sponge works well. You can also supply a gel-based product that provides both water and a source of vitamins and minerals (for gutloading) such as [Fluker's Cricket Quencher](#). Another food and water option is a product like [Fluker's Orange Cube Complete Cricket Diet](#) or Ectotherm Cricket Yummies. These feed, water, and gutload your crickets all at the same time, making it easy to provide them with the proper diet.

Mealworms will actually eat their bedding, so you won't need to

purchase a special diet for them. To make them more nutritious for your herp, you can add maize, corn meal, bone meal, and other items to their substrate. You should also put a piece of carrot, overripe banana peel, ripe apple, or small pieces of orange on top of the bedding as a source of moisture. Be sure to change it daily to prevent molding, and check the substrate regularly to make sure it's still dry. Mealworms should be removed from the fridge at least once a week to allow them to warm up, become active, and eat.

Remember, your herp eats what his dinner eats, so it's important to only feed foods that are healthy for your herp.

[\[Back to Top \]](#)

What is gutloading?

Gutloading refers to the practice of filling feeder insects with foods that are nutritious and vitamin-rich for your herp before feeding them to your herp. It should be done within 24 - 48 hours before they are put in your herp's enclosure.

[\[Back to Top \]](#)

How should I feed the crickets and mealworms to my herp?

Crickets can be placed directly in your herp's enclosure, or they can be put in a [Live Cricket Feeding Rock](#) that allows the crickets to gradually crawl out into the terrarium. This is highly beneficial as it both reduces waste and encourages more natural feeding behavior. Simply remove the crickets from their container, place them in the Feeding Rock, and, after adding supplemental powders to the rock, place the rock in your herp's cage.

After your herp is done eating, be sure to remove the leftover crickets from the tank. This is for a number of reasons. First, the crickets will actually view your herp as a food source (remember, they're omnivorous), and start to nibble on him. Second, they will contribute to the waste products in the cage and make it harder for you to keep the tank sanitary. Finally, having them in there will actually stress your herp.

Mealworms should be fed in a dish to prevent them from escaping into the [substrate](#) in your herp's enclosure. Items such as the [Exo Terra Insect Feeding Dish](#) are great because they allow your herps to see their food, but they have a shape designed to contain the mealworms. To feed mealworms to your herp, you must first take the mealworms out of the fridge. Allow them to warm up and become active (up to 24 hours before feeding them to your herp), place them in the Feeding Dish, and, after lightly dusting them with supplemental powders, place the dish in the cage.

[\[Back to Top \]](#)

Why should I dust the crickets and mealworms with a calcium and vitamin powder before feeding them to my herp?

Crickets and mealworms must be dusted with supplemental powders containing calcium and vitamins to prevent dietary deficiencies. Crickets have a calcium to phosphorus ratio of about 0.33:1. Mealworms have a calcium to phosphorus ratio of anywhere from 0.7:1 to 0.33:1. Therefore, crickets and mealworms alone do not provide enough calcium, and a supplement is needed.

[\[Back to Top \]](#)

What is the nutritional information of crickets and mealworms?

Crickets:

55.3% protein
30.2% fat
0.23% calcium

Mealworms:

22.3% protein
14.9% fat
0.26% calcium

[\[Back to Top \]](#)

What size crickets and mealworms should I feed my herp?

The general rule is that you should feed your herp insects that are no larger than 1/2 to 2/3 the size of his head, or the distance between his eyes. This is especially important for juvenile herps. Both crickets and mealworms come in sizes ranging from 1/4" to 1" long.

[\[Back to Top \]](#)

What is the difference between mealworms and giant mealworms?

They are the same worm, but giant mealworms have been treated with an insect growth hormone to discourage the shift into the beetle stage and increase their size. Because of this treatment, many herp owners elect not to feed giant mealworms.

[\[Back to Top \]](#)

Are waxworms and superworms different from mealworms?

Yes, they are different kinds of worms. Waxworms are small, soft worms that resemble grubs. They grow to a maximum length of 1". They should only be fed to put weight on sick reptiles or occasionally as a treat. This is because they are high in fat and can cause obesity problems for a healthy herp if fed as part of a daily diet. Waxworms should be kept in the fridge and allowed to reach room temperature before feeding.

Superworms are much larger than mealworms (even larger than giant mealworms), and very active. They can grow to be as long as 3". They are ideal for larger herps that prefer to eat moving prey, and are a great addition to a varied diet. They have approximately the same nutritional value as mealworms, but they have softer bodies, so they're easier to digest. Unlike mealworms and waxworms, superworms cannot be kept in the fridge, as the cold would kill them. Their habitat should be around 80° to 85°F. Like many other feeder insects, they should be gutloaded before feeding them to your herp.

[\[Back to Top \]](#)

Can I feed my herp crickets that I catch?

We do not recommend catching your own crickets, as you risk exposing your herps to disease or environmental toxins such as pesticides. A much safer way to cut down on costs is to purchase your first batch of crickets or mealworms and then breed them yourself.

[[Back to Top](#)]