

## Go Live! Learn the Secrets of Cricket Breeding & Gut Loading

*Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff*



Live food is important to the quality of life for many popular pet lizards. Breeding and raising your own crickets is particularly advantageous because the quality nutrition you provide can be passed on to your pet. Here's what you need to get started:

### **Source of Adult Crickets**

Initially, you will need to buy [live crickets](#) to start your breeding. An order of 15-20 large crickets should yield at least 100 hatchlings.

### **Winter Shipping of Crickets:**

After your crickets arrive, they may need some time to acclimate to their environment and warm back to a normal temperature. When being shipped in the winter months, your crickets may go into a dormant state with the appearance that they are dead. They do this to protect themselves from the cold and increase their chance for survival. So if you notice your crickets aren't moving, place them in a warm room and allow them to warm up inside of the box. Room temperature warmth is sufficient; if you place them near a heat source, be careful not to overheat them. Also placing them in a window can allow the sun to overheat them. After the crickets begin moving around, you can place them in your holding container and care for them as usual.

### **Breeding Kit**

A Breeding kit offers the optimum place for adults to lay eggs, plus supplies food to promote healthy growth. All you need to do is keep the bedding moist by spraying the bedding material with water about every other day. This most closely resembles the cricket's natural nesting material, damp soil. Then, watch for eggs between 4 and 7 days. You can incubate your eggs in a separate container to maintain proper moisture and humidity. You should see hatchlings in about 16 days.

### **Secure Habitat**

It is essential to keep the babies separate from the adults. Prior to the hatch, adults

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Learn the Secrets of Cricket Breeding & Gut Loading - Page 1 of 3

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should be moved from the breeding kit to a Cricket Keeper, a glass terrarium, or other smooth container. A [screen cover](#) is ideal in order to provide necessary ventilation and prevent escape. Because adults live about 3-4 weeks, use of at least two habitats is recommended. Returning some adult crickets to a breeding colony will replenish the breeding colony in order to maintain a fresh cricket supply at all times. If this is not done, the breeding colony could die out.

### Warmth

The optimum temperature for crickets is about 80° Fahrenheit. For breeding crickets, the ideal temperature range is 82 to 86° F. If you hold them in the 70's, this slows them down and increases longevity if your goal is to keep them as long as possible. In order for your crickets to thrive in their environment, a 40 watt bulb in a [dome reflector](#) will meet the needs of a 10 gallon terrarium. Use a [thermometer](#) to help you regulate the temperature.

Also humidity is very important to the success of raising crickets. Eggs and hatchlings need humidity close to 100%. As crickets age they need less humidity; large crickets do best with little humidity.

### High-Nutrition Food

#### Staple Diet

It is important to feed your crickets a nutrition packed diet. This will ensure that when the crickets are fed to your reptile, the nutrition is passed on to him. Provide a water source such as Quencher, moistened paper towels, or a water dish with gravel. For added moisture and nourishment, provide fresh lettuce and an orange slice twice weekly. Ready-to-feed commercial foods provide vitamins, minerals, proteins, carbohydrates and fats that your crickets need to be an excellent source of nutrition for your reptile. This form of cricket food is convenient and trouble-free to feed.



#### Gut Loading with Calcium

The food value of crickets can be dramatically enhanced when you feed them nutritious and vitamin-rich foods such as [Calcium-Fortified Cricket Quencher](#) or [Fluker's High-Calcium Cricket Diet](#). Gut loading crickets with these products provides your reptile with much needed calcium and protein.

#### Additional Calcium

Feeder insects can be coated with a calcium supplement, like [ReptoCal](#), as directed on the label. For best results, mist crickets with water and place in a Duster cup. To use, simply snap the two halves apart, pour in a powdered vitamin or mineral supplement, place 10-20 crickets inside, gently roll from side to side, and set the cup back in the terrarium for the tasty crickets to crawl out.

#### Feeding Live Crickets

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Learn the Secrets of Cricket Breeding & Gut Loading - Page 2 of 3

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For most reptile species, crickets can be let loose in their environment for feeding. Remember to feed the appropriate size of crickets to your herp. Feeding crickets that are too large can cause serious digestive problems, especially in Bearded Dragons. You may need to use Feeding Tongs when you feed your pet turtle because it is difficult for them to catch loose crickets on their own. You may also want to consider placing a jar lid with cricket food in your reptile's environment so the crickets have something to eat in case they are not eaten immediately. Check daily for dead crickets and remove them from your reptile's environment.

**Remember, a well-fed cricket makes for a happier, healthier reptile.**

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Learn the Secrets of Cricket Breeding & Gut Loading - Page 3 of 3

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