



Giant Centipedes *Order Scolopendromorpha*

- Centipedes are elongated, segmented invertebrates that can vary considerably in size, color, and appearance depending on species. All centipedes, however, have a modified pair of claw or pincer like appendages beneath their rounded heads called forcipules, a long pair of antennae, typically one pair of legs per segment (anywhere from 30 to over 300), and telson like rear appendages.
- Centipedes can be found in moist and humid microhabitats in temperate to tropical areas throughout most of the world, with the larger species of Scolopendromorphs being found in the southwestern United States, Mexico through Central and South America, and much of southern to southeastern Asia, and Australia depending on species.
- Most of the Scolopendromorph centipedes display brighter aposematic coloration of brown, reddish brown, blackish, to olive brown body segments and brightly colored red, yellow, orange, or whitish heads, antennae, and limbs.
- Unlike millipedes, which they may be confused with, centipedes are fast moving, aggressive predators of many invertebrates and even other small animals, using their speed, venom, and forcipules to capture and overpower prey.
- Several different orders and families of centipedes are known, but the order Scolopendromorpha are the most commonly kept due to their large size and colorations.

Size

Centipedes can vary greatly in size from less than 1” to 12-16” in the larger, more commonly kept Scolopendromorphs.

Housing

Provide a sturdy and secure escape proof yet adequately ventilated enclosure, such as a 5 to 20 gallon terrarium for most commonly kept species. There are many substrates that can be used to house centipedes including orchard bark, potting soil, sphagnum moss, vermiculite, or any combination thereof for tropical to desert species of centipedes. Furnishings can be provided, but ensure any live plants chosen are non toxic to centipedes and are sturdy and firmly planted. Provide at least 2-3 inches of substrate that can retain humidity moderately well, and ample hides such as cork bark hides, slabs, or other log/rock hides. A feeding dish, shallow water dish, and hiding spaces should also be created or provided as well.

Most tropical species of centipedes can be maintained at or around room temperature of 75-85 degrees F, seldom to exceed 90 degrees F. Maintaining adequate humidity and moisture is a major husbandry consideration in keeping centipedes, as most lack the waxy cuticles that other insects and arachnids possess, and are more prone to dessication when temperatures become too high or humidity too low. Some desert species requiring higher levels of heating can be provided a small under tank heating element or low wattage bulb as well. Millipedes are primarily nocturnal, and do not require any additional UV lighting or heating.

Feeding/Diet

Most species of centipedes are carnivorous, and will feed on a variety of insects and other invertebrates, and even small reptiles, amphibians, and mammals they can catch and overpower. As a captive diet, most feeder insects of appropriate size can be provided including crickets, mealworms, waxworms, roaches, and fruit flies. They will also take frozen thawed pinkie rodents or feeder lizards of appropriate size as well. Additional calcium and other

vitamin/nutritional elements are typically not required with maintaining centipedes.

Handling

Centipedes as an order and group can be fast moving and aggressive invertebrates, and thus handling is not recommended. Some species are capable of delivering a painful and unpleasant bite/sting and several species are medically significant in terms of their venom. The appropriate tools applied in a gentle manner such as tongs, tweezers, and trap boxes can be used to move centipedes for any necessary reason.

Also be sure to practice basic cleanliness and hygiene associated with proper husbandry after touching or handling any animals or animal enclosures to prevent the possibility of contracting salmonellosis or any other zoonotic pathogens