



Feeder House Crickets and Field Crickets (*Acheta domestica*) and (*Gryllus* sp.)

Introduction

The common brown cricket, or house cricket, is a widely ranging, cosmopolitan species of cricket found throughout most of the world, but is believed to be indigenous to northern Africa, east to southern and southeastern Asia. Belonging to the group of insects known as the “true crickets”, the family Gryllidae consists of over 900 species found worldwide in a variety of temperate to tropical environments including grasslands, forests and woodlands, wetlands, beaches, caves, agricultural, residential, and other areas of human habitation. Crickets are perhaps best known for their nocturnal to crepuscular habit of chirping, which is a sound produced by males, and to a lesser extent females by rubbing the edges of their wings together at differing speeds and rates. This is known as stridulation, and is performed through an organ located on the tegmen, or forewing. They will chirp at different rates depending on their ambient temperatures, as well as in order to attract mates, or to signal territory and dominance towards potential rivals.

The house cricket, as well as the black field cricket (*Gryllus bimaculatus*), are perhaps the widely utilized feeder insect staples for a wide range of reptiles, amphibians, arthropods, and even birds and other animals. Some care should be taken when feeding older/larger adult crickets, as they can have hard, chitinous exoskeletons that can be difficult for some animals to digest, however. Most species of feeder crickets attain a longevity of 8 to 10 weeks, and can grow and develop rapidly depending on the temperatures provided. Newly emerged crickets are known as “pinheads”. Generally, crickets should be purchased or acquired at suitable sizes for one’s animal within a two week margin of growth period. Overall, crickets are a hardy and widely utilized feeder insect.

Taxonomy-House Cricket:

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities

Domain: Eukaryota

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Arthropoda

Class: Insecta

Order: Orthoptera

Suborder: Ensifera

Family: Gryllidae

Genus: Acheta

Species: *Acheta domesticus**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Taxonomy-Field Cricket:

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Domain: Eukaryota
Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Arthropoda
Class: Insecta
Order: Orthoptera
Suborder: Ensifera
Family: Gryllidae
Subfamily: Gryllinae

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Experience Level Required

Novice/Beginner.

Size

The adult house cricket is fairly small, ranging from ½ an inch to about 1 ¼ inches. Field crickets can reach up to 2 inches.

Housing and Enclosure

Housing, or enclosures for house crickets can be relatively simple and inexpensive to purchase and maintain. Many commercially available tubs (including those made by Rubbermaid, Sterilite, and Iris), aquariums/terrariums, Kritter Keepers, or other containers of sufficient height of at least 18 inches as to prevent escape often work well. The container or enclosure should be large enough for each cricket housed within it to be accommodated and not be in constant contact with any wastes inside the container. Crickets especially are adept at escaping by climbing and/or jumping when given the opportunity. Therefore, a layer of Vaseline, plastic boxing tape, or other slippery surface can be used around the top 2 to 3 inches to one third of the container. A tight, securely fitting lid or top with adequate ventilation can also be used as well. If using a plastic container, the lid that comes with the container can be used and modified by punching or carving out a section and covering it with a secure wire mesh. Fiberglass screening works less well as, over time, crickets can chew through this material. Cleaning wise, containers should be spot cleaned and cleaned regularly every 1 to 2 weeks to remove any soiled food, debris, dead or decaying crickets, and frass (shed exoskeletons). Crickets are quite sensitive to fumes and chemicals, and dead crickets and other wastes in the container can produce toxins that can kill the living crickets and create an overall foul and unkempt environment.

Many different substrates can be used to house feeder crickets, but any substrate that is chosen should obviously be chemical and pesticide free. Aspen shavings, Sani chips, coconut fibers, sphagnum moss and cypress mulch, bark, paper towel, newspaper are some substrates that can be used. Conversely, many people find that maintaining them simply on a bare (or no substrate) also often works well. In addition, suitable hides, shelters, and other furnishings that can be provided can include egg crates/cartons, cork bark, rock slabs, and other similar materials. Providing adequate space, hides, and food is a must, as crickets are territorial and cannibalistic, and will kill and consume one another without adequate resources.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity

Generally, house crickets can be maintained anywhere from 75 to 85 degrees F., and 50 to 60% humidity. Crickets fare poorly in areas of higher humidity, and can be kept in relatively dry conditions. If additional heating is needed, a low wattage incandescent bulb, ceramic heat emitter, or UTH (or under tank heating pad) can be used. More specific lighting, heating, and humidity product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of any feeder species can be given as well. If an UTH is used, create at least a ¼ inch gap

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to create adequate airflow. Also be sure to use a quality dimmer or thermostat as well. Additional lighting typically is not required for house crickets.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

House crickets are omnivorous, meaning they will eat a variety of both plant and animal matter. Feeding and diet for house crickets is also relatively simple with a few considerations to keep in mind. As they are intended as feeders, any diet that is provided should be a quality one, and should include gutloading (which entails providing them a quality, nutritionally sound diet which can be derived by the animals that consume them). A wide variety of fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as grain based diets can be provided to most feeder crickets, including, but not limited to apples, pears, oranges, carrots, bananas, broccoli, potatoes, and other fruits and vegetables. Avoid commercially available dog and cat foods, as well as other meats. Food matter that becomes moldy, soiled, or otherwise uneaten should be cleaned and removed regularly. Many commercially available cricket diets are also available. Food can be provided in a small, shallow food bowl or dish as well. For water and hydration, water crystals are perhaps the best source for their hydration. Water crystals are commercially available at many reptile shows and expos, suppliers, and reptile/exotic pet specialty stores, and that consist of a synthetic, gel-like material that absorbs water. An actual water container or deli-cup can also be used, but should be low and shallow enough to prevent them from drowning, but easily accessible. Dampened sponges, paper towels, cotton balls, or fresh fruits can also work well for hydration. More specific dietary and supplementary product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well.

Handling

Most crickets and other feeder insects can easily be handled, moved, or transferred from one container or enclosure to another if needed by gently shaking or tapping the egg carton, tube, or other hide that they are on or within. It is recommended that they be dusted or supplemented with calcium and other vitamins prior to feeding to other animals as well. Individuals can also be gently grasped and offered using forceps or tweezers as well.

It is possible for some people to develop allergies to feeder insects and/or their frass (droppings and waste products) as a result of too frequent of handling or constant exposure to thereof. Handling your feeder insects in a well ventilated room or other area, and using gloves are some ways to prevent any potential human health related issues. Also remember to 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

Contact

Authored by Eric Roscoe. For any additional questions, comments, and/or concerns regarding this animal, group of animals, or this care sheet, please email and contact the Madison Area Herpetological Society at info@madisonherps.org

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