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Ornamental Tarantulas (*Poecilotheria* spp.)

Old World Ornamentals

Ornamental tarantulas are large, arboreal spiders that are also known as the “tiger spiders”, “ornamental tree Spiders”, and oftentimes “Pokies” in the industry and hobby, which is derived from the Greek meaning *poikilos* - spotted and *therion* - wild beast. Ornamental tarantulas are a medium sized to large, fairly slender bodied genus of tarantulas consisting of about 15 species commonly named for their intricate and ornately colored and patterned legs, carapace, and abdomen ranging from light to deep vibrant blues, grays to grayish blues, blacks, yellows, oranges, whites, and/or cream colors. Ornamental tarantulas are highly arboreal, or tree dwelling spiders that are nocturnal to crepuscular, and unlike many other tarantulas, will often act as ambush predators of insects, other invertebrates, and even small mammals or birds. The most commonly kept of the Ornamentals is the Indian Ornamental, *P. regalis* and Gooty Sapphire Ornamental, *P. metallica*. Other species are also available, but less common and still remain fairly new to the pet industry.

Taxonomy

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities

Domain: Eukaryota

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Arthropoda

Subphylum: Chelicerata

Class: Arachnida

Order: Araneae

Infraorder: Mygalomorphae

Family: Theraphosidae

Genus: *Poecilotheria*

Species: *Poecilotheria* spp.*

*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

Lifespan and Longevity

Males of many tarantula species will often attain life spans of only 5 to 6 years. Females attain considerably longer life spans of 15 to 20 years or more in captivity.

Distribution and Habitat

An Old World genus, Ornamentals range from southern to southeastern Asia among the tropical

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to subtropical forests and woodlands of India, Sri Lanka, and surrounding areas.

Conservation Status

Conservation status dependent upon the species. Species may be Not Evaluated for the IUCN Red List (NE) or otherwise Data Deficient (DD), Least Concern (LC), Vulnerable (VU), Endangered (EN), or Critically Endangered (CE).

Legal and Regulatory Status (*Subject to Change)

Poecilotheria fasciata, Poecilotheria ornata, Poecilotheria pederseni, Poecilotheria smithi, and Poecilotheria subfusca are Endangered Species Act of 1974 listed species. Also consult with your local, municipal, and state ordinances and regulations for any ownership restrictions.

Experience Level Required

Intermediate/Moderate to Advanced.

Size

Ornamental tarantulas are medium-sized to large tarantulas reaching a total legspan of about 5 ½ to 9 inches on average.

Housing and Enclosure

Provide a sturdy, secure, and escape proof terrarium or enclosure 5 to 20 gallons tall in size with a secure top for a single adult spider. Several of the acrylic displays and enclosures that are now manufactured for housing arachnids, insects, and other invertebrates can also be used. Spiderlings can be housed in an appropriately sized spiderling vial, plastic container or deli cup with adequate holes for ventilation. Acceptable substrate to use can include pesticide free potting soil, coconut fiber, vermiculite, or similar substrates 1 to 3 inches in depth. Decorations and/or other cage furnishings can also be included as well, although height is more important than floor space. This is an arboreal genus that benefits from branches, vertical cork bark, and plants for refuge. A fairly small, shallow water dish can also be provided, and should be cleaned regularly as well as regular misting for hydration.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity

Most species of tarantulas have simple and undemanding heating and lighting requirements in captivity, and do not require additional UVA/UVB lighting, although providing it can be greatly beneficial for your tarantula's health, immune system, and overall wellness. Ornamental tarantulas are a genus that do best at room temperature between 78 to 82 degrees. Weekly and monthly regular misting will also help maintain humidity. Maintain at 65 to 80% humidity but the enclosure must have adequate ventilation and substrate be kept dry. For any supplemental heating that may be needed, use a low wattage incandescent or UVA/UVB bulb, radiant or ceramic heat emitter, or UTH (under tank heating element). More specific lighting, heating, and humidity product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Insectivorous to Carnivorous; In the wild, ornamental tarantulas are primarily insectivorous, meaning they eat insects and other invertebrates. They will also occasionally eat smaller vertebrates as well if they can catch and subdue them. In captivity, these tarantulas can be fed a variety of appropriately sized feeder insects such as crickets, roaches, mealworms, superworms, and waxworms. Feeder insects should be gut-loaded in order to increase their optimal nutritional

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value. This will promote optimal exoskeleton growth and development. Any uneaten food items should be cleaned and removed after a day or two. Their feeding frequency will depend on the age, size, and overall health of your animal. Use care as to not overfeed even invertebrates, as obesity and other health related issues can still become an issue with them. 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 of the Ornaments are fast moving species that also can have potentially potent venom and are not suitable spiders for beginners. Therefore, handling these species typically is not recommended. Ornaments are better suited as a display spider overall. In general, tarantulas are fragile animals, and accidentally dropping a spider can result in the rupture of its internal organs and/or exoskeleton, causing death to your tarantula. Although most tarantulas are not medically significant, with most being lesser than or just about equal to a bee sting, medical attention should still be sought from any apparent allergic reaction to a bite, or extreme irritation from urticating hairs from a pet tarantula, particularly the Ornaments.

****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****

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

Disclaimer: Note that the information provided in these, or any care sheets, are not intended to be all-exhaustive, and further research and care should always be sought and provided when it comes to any species one may prospectively be interested in. These care sheets are also not intended to serve as substitutes for professional veterinary medical care and husbandry should any animal require it. Always seek proper and professional veterinary care for any animal should the need arise, and be prepared ahead of time for any and all husbandry costs and expenses that may occur with any animal beyond the initial purchase. Any animal owned is ultimately a matter of personal/individual care and responsibility. MAHS cannot make any claims or guarantees regarding any information in this care sheet therein. This care sheet may be reprinted or redistributed only in its entirety, including any and all MAHS logos and disclaimers.

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