



\*Fangs & Fashion

## Mexican Red Kneed Tarantula (*Brachypelma smithi*)

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### A Long Time Classic

Mexican red kneed tarantulas are a fairly large, terrestrial to fossorial, or burrowing species of tarantula indigenous to Mexico in the New World. These boldly colored and patterned, classic species are black to dark colored with vibrant red to reddish range patches on the legs and joints. As with many tarantulas, this species can use its hind limbs to flick its loosely lodged hairs on its abdomen and limbs to serve as an irritant to many predators, and are known as urticating hairs, however. A docile and hardy species, the Mexican red kneed tarantula is an attractive and suitable choice for beginners that has long been a popular choice among beginning hobbyists and pet owners.

### 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:** *Brachypelma*

**Species:** *Brachypelma smithi*\*

\*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

The Mexican red kneed tarantula is a species of large, terrestrial species of New World tarantula indigenous to portions of Central America. More specifically, this bold classic of a species occurs along the western Pacific coast of Mexico, particularly within the state of Guerrero.

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Within this coastal range, this species of colorful tarantula can be found in the deciduous to tropical or sub-tropical forests, to scrublands, semi-deserts, and woodlands, where they occupy self-excavated burrows, burrows constructed by other animals, and underneath vegetation, rocks, logs, and other ground debris.

### **Conservation Status**

IUCN Red List Lower Risk (LR) to near Threatened (NT).

### **Legal and Regulatory Status (\*Subject to Change)**

Brachypelma spp. are CITES Appendix II as of October 2017. Also consult with your local, municipal, and state ordinances and regulations for any ownership restrictions.

### **Experience Level Required**

Novice/Beginner.

### **Size**

Mexican red-kneed tarantulas are medium-sized to large tarantulas reaching a total legspan of about 4 to 5 ½ inches on average.

### **Housing and Enclosure**

Provide a sturdy, secure, and escape proof terrarium or enclosure 5 to 10 gallons long 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 3 to 4 inches in depth. Decorations and/or other cage furnishings can also be included as well, although floor space is more important than height. This is a primarily terrestrial to burrowing species, but benefits from branches, horizontal 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. Mexican red kneed tarantulas are a hardy species that do best at room temperature between 70 to 80 degrees. 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, Mexican red kneed 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 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

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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**

Mexican red kneed tarantulas are typically a docile and slow moving species that can be handled carefully so as to avoid injuring the spider. 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. Mexican red kneed tarantulas may also kick urticating hairs from their abdomen and hind legs or "rear up" to display its fangs and front legs when upset or agitated. 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.

**\*\*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](mailto:info@madisonherps.org)

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