



Hermit Crab

Hermit crabs make fun and interesting pets – in fact, they are probably more interesting than you know! In order to have one of these creatures as a pet, it is absolutely essential that you know a few vital hermit crab facts. Fortunately, this can make for a fun learning experience as well.

So, what does a hermit crab look like? Like other crabs, hermit crabs have no backbone – they are invertebrates. A lot of people do not realize that they can be a whole spectrum of different colors. Typically they are a reddish color, an orange shade, or sort of brown. Many of them also have purple spots and other patterns. Except for the molting period, when they shed their exoskeleton and move from one shell to another, their soft bodies, which are twisted, remain hidden within their shells. They have ten legs with joints and two claws in front.

The shell they are in isn't theirs – they have borrowed it from a sea snail! When a crab gets too big for its shell, it moves to another one. That's why your hermit crab pet needs to have another shell in his habitat, in case he needs to move to a bigger home.

There are quite a few interesting hermit crab facts associated with where these creatures are found. Some of them live on the land and some of them live in the sea. With more than five hundred different species, you can understand the variety of types involved here. But most hermit crabs are ocean-based creatures.

During their life cycle, a female hermit crab releases her fertilized eggs into the ocean. Because most crabs reproduce in the ocean, they can not be bred in captivity. Once in the larval stage, the baby hermit crabs grow through the molting process. All hermit crabs molt. The younger ones, because they grow at a faster rate, can molt every few months. Adult hermit crabs tend to molt every eighteen months or so.

Other essential hermit crab facts involve their diets. The good news is that hermit crabs are not picky eaters. In fact, whatever hermit crabs eat is identical to a healthy human diet: meat, fish, fresh fruits and vegetables. Hermit crabs will eat a wide variety of foods and it can be fun to experiment to see which your pet crabs like the best. Try fruits and vegetables, tuna fish, peanut butter, crackers or potato chips. Grapes, raisins and popcorn are crab favorites.

Some hermit crabs have lived as long as 15 years in captivity! Because they are nocturnal (move around at night) they can be a loud pet to have in your bedroom, so it's better to keep them in some other room if you have a hermit crab as a pet.

Hermit crabs are not actually 'Hermits'. They like a crowd and are seen in groups of 100 or more on the beach. Make sure to always have more than one crab if you get them for pets – or you'll end up with a sad lonely crab.

Taking care of hermit crabs takes a lot of work and you should be ready to do the work in order to keep your hermit crabs happy and healthy. If you are ready to put the work into your hermit crab care, then you will really enjoy having these wonderful little exotic pets. If you aren't willing to work hard at caring for hermit crabs, then you should maybe think about another type of pet because hermit crabs cannot live without the proper care.

Habitat

Hermit crab care starts with giving them the appropriate habitat. Start with a clear tank because they are the best to be able to watch your hermit crab dig and play. In order to properly take care of hermit crabs you will want to provide them with some good, clean sand or gravel in the bottom of the tank, or better yet, a substrate called forest bedding, which is made out of coconut fibers. The forest bedding stays moist longer, although you don't want it to be too wet, and it is a better consistency for the hermit crabs to dig their tunnels into.

Water and Food Caring for hermit crabs means that you have to provide them with the proper food and water. Food can be purchased at the local pet store. There is special hermit crab food that you can buy. Or, you can look up your species of hermit crab care and see what kinds of foods they like to eat so that you can give your hermit crabs special treats once in a while. They will also eat the forest bedding and the wood from driftwood pieces that you might put in the tank.

Water should be kept clean and free of chlorine. There are drops or tablets that you can buy at the pet store that will remove the chlorine from tap water. You don't necessarily have to regularly bathe your hermit crabs, but you will want to provide them with a bowl of water that they can climb in and out of that is about an inch deep. Hermit crabs will bathe themselves.

Handling

Part of caring for hermit crabs is loving your hermit crabs. To show them that you love them you might want to take them out of their cages and hold them sometimes. This is fine, but remember that hermit crabs have pinchers and they might pinch you, and it can hurt. Sometimes hermit crabs pinch because they are nervous and sometimes it is because they are hungry, so if your hermit crab is pinching you should put him back in the cage and make sure it has food. If he isn't pinching, then he probably likes it when you hold him.

Types

There are two different species of hermit crabs that you will commonly find being sold as pets in the United States, and both of them come from the Caribbean. That makes them exotic pets. One species is the land hermit crab, also called the Caribbean crab, the purple pincher crab, or the soldier crab. Its scientific name is *Coenobita clypeatus*. The second common species of hermit crab pets in the US is the Ecuadorian crab, also called the E-crab or Eccie. Its scientific name is *Coenobita compressus*.

You can tell which hermit crab you have by looking at its pinchers. The land hermit crab, or purple pincher crab will have – surprise! – purple pinchers. The purple pinchers will probably be a little bit lighter at the tips than the rest of the pinchers, but that is not always true. The land hermit crabs also have bumpier pinchers than the Eccie, but you might need to compare them side by side to see this difference.

Most people choose to buy the land hermit crabs because they live on fresh water. In their native habitat, land hermit crabs live in the forest and drink the rain water when it puddles, so in order to provide a land hermit crab with the right kind of water you just need to either capture the rain or dechlorinate the water from your kitchen faucet. There are tablets or drops that you can use to dechlorinate your water for your land hermit crabs.

Ecuadorian crabs, on the other hand, are native to Ecuador, which is right on the ocean. These hermit crabs live in the sand on the beaches and survive on the ocean water. In order to keep Ecuadorian crabs alive you will have to have a special salt water environment for them. Some people keep both kinds of hermit crabs in one tank, but they need to have two places for their crabs to drink and bathe, a salt water place and a fresh water place.

Hermit crabs are not exactly hermits, as their names imply. Hermit crabs are very social creatures and they like to have lots of friends. This is because in their native environment, hermit crabs travel in groups, called packs, of up to 100 friends and family. There is a reason that they travel in large packs. Hermit crabs grow, but their shells do not. They need to be able to find a new shell when they grow out of their old ones. Packs of hermit crabs are all sizes and shapes so that they can trade shells when they need to. So if you want to begin raising hermit crabs just remember, the more the merrier! Make your hermit habitat large enough to add some friends.

Molting Process

Hermit crabs, like snakes, shed their skin when they grow new and better skin. This process is called molting. Molting happens naturally about every 18 months for a hermit crab, but smaller hermits might molt more often. During the molting process the crab will regrow any limbs it has lost.

When a hermit crab molts, it will dig a tunnel into the sand so that it can have some privacy and protection from the elements. It is best to provide your molter with a special place to do his thing. If you can, buy a separate molting tank and fill it with about six inches of sand or forest bedding. The sand or bedding should be moist, but not dripping wet. You should be able to make a mound in the substrate that stays put, like when you make a sand castle.

During the molting process it is best to leave your hermit crab alone. Just a squirt of water over the molting tunnel each day is enough to keep hermit happy. Once he has finished molting he will emerge from his tunnel, but he won't be completely hardened yet. You really should leave him alone during the hardening process, too.

Don't be surprised if your hermit crab looks smaller after he has molted, because he is smaller a little bit. He will add to his size as he hardens and will get back into shape in no time. There is no need to worry about your hermit crab during the molting and hardening process, it is perfectly natural and he will feel much better after it is over.

You will know when your hermit crab is ready to molt when he starts to change his appearance. His eyes will look foggy and he won't move around as much. His antennae will look funny, too, and won't move much. He will also start to dig his tunnel, but he might also dig if his conditions aren't the best, too, so be sure to check the temperature and humidity of the tank when he starts to tunnel before you assume that he is ready to molt.

One way to know for sure if your hermit crab is about to molt when he digs a tunnel is to first check the conditions of the tank. If the temperature and humidity are fine, then just smooth the bedding out over the tunnel, without collapsing the tunnel on him, and check in the morning to see if he came up to eat or get a drink. You'll know because there will be a new hole in the bedding. If he has come up then he is probably not molting and is digging for another reason. If he hasn't, then move him into his new temporary molting home.

Another Shell

A lot of people enjoy keeping hermit crabs as pets – but there are a lot of things you need to know beforehand. One of the most common questions a novice hermit crab owner finds him or herself asking is probably this: Why does my hermit crab need another shell? Not a lot of people understand the whole molting process. That is no problem, however, because it is easy to learn about the hermit crab's need to change shells.

Hermit crabs go through a shedding process in order to grow, like some insects do. Shedding the skin is known as “molting”. After the molt, the crab is larger and so needs a larger place to live. The shell they are in isn't theirs – they have borrowed it from a sea snail! When a crab gets too big for its shell, it has to move into a larger one. For the majority of hermit crabs, they will need a larger shell every eighteen months or so. However, certain small hermit crabs may molt more frequently than this. If at any time between their current molt and their last molt they have lost any limbs or claws, they will grow back during the molting process! Neat!

While the hermit crab is in the process of acquiring another shell, you need to leave him be – the poor ‘naked crab’ that is between shells will be soft and vulnerable. The crab can be very sensitive and delicate during this time, so you do not want to put him in danger. After being in his new shell a bit they will harden up and can be handled again.

Food

What do hermit crabs eat? It is a common question among those pet owners who are first learning the joys of having a hermit crab. Hermit crabs are wild animals that have been caught and learn to live in captivity easily since they are very versatile eaters with healthy appetites. The good news is that they do not have a tendency to be picky eaters. Still, you have to bear in mind a number of things when feeding them. For instance, did you know that they locate food by either seeing that other crabs are eating something or smelling the food themselves?

In fact, to stay healthy, hermit crabs need to eat just like we do if we are maintaining a nutritional diet. Simply put, hermit crabs are omnivores, just like we are. They can eat meats, they can have fish, they can certainly have vegetables, and you can even give them fresh fruit for dessert. Whenever possible, these foods should be organic, or at least unprocessed. Everything needs to be washed thoroughly before being served. After that, especially with vegetables and fruits, let the food dry. Hermit crabs also eat foods rich in tannin. This includes oak tree leaves and even bark. These too need to be washed and left to dry.

The hermit crab diet you can buy at the pet store sometimes has extra supplements in it like calcium, antioxidants and carotene. If their diet does not contain enough of these then, after they have gone through the molting process, their color will be faded and they may have problems molting.

Hermit crabs love to try different foods. Hermit crabs will eat a wide variety of foods and it can be fun to experiment to see which your pet crabs like the best. Try fruits and vegetables, tuna fish, peanut butter, crackers or potato chips. Grapes, raisins and popcorn are crab favorites.

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