



Rosehair Tarantula

Rose hair tarantulas are found in deserts and scrub lands of Bolivia, Argentina, and Chile. They are a beautiful species, some specimens being more brightly colored than others. As with most desert dwelling tarantulas, these animals are nomads, living solitary lives and fending for themselves. They are also nocturnal, spending their days in the shelter of moist, cool burrows, and venturing out at night in search of prey or a potential mate.

This species is currently in a state of taxonomical flux. There are arguments insisting that the rose hair tarantulas we are familiar with are actually three separate subspecies. Others state that they are a single species, but with multiple naturally occurring color phases. In any case, any so-called rose hair tarantula offered for sale should be expected to have very similar care requirements to those outlined here.

Due to their docile and predictable behavior, rose hairs have become a favorite species among beginning tarantula hobbyists. In addition, they are very hardy, and can withstand a wide variety of environmental conditions, making captive husbandry rather simple.

Size and Longevity

Rose hair tarantulas are a fairly slow growing species, taking up to 4 years to reach maturity. Adults will range in size, but the average leg span is 4 to 5 inches, with the occasional female getting slightly larger.

As with all tarantulas, females outlive their male counterparts considerably. When males reach sexual maturity (indicated by the presence of physical sexual characteristics after a final molt) their life is nearly over. Unfortunately males of this species seldom live more than 4 or 5 years. Females however, can easily live to be 15 years old, and 20 year old rose hairs are not unheard of.

Housing

In theory, tarantulas may be housed in any secure, well ventilated enclosure of appropriate size. Small plastic "Kritter keepers" and 2 to 5 gallon glass terrariums are ideal. Glass enclosures are more desirable due to the ease of heating them during cooler months.

Tarantulas neither want or need a huge enclosure. They are nearly blind, and depend mostly on sense of touch to navigate and interpret their surroundings. Therefore, they do best in enclosures where they can roam about freely, but not feel overly exposed.

Heating and Lighting

Lighting is not necessary for tarantulas. In fact, most species shun bright light, and are more likely to be observed doing natural behaviors if the lighting is gentle and dim. Typically ambient room lighting is sufficient. Additionally, overhead incandescent lights tend to dry out the enclosures, making it very hard to keep the humidity at an acceptable level.

Rose hair tarantulas do best when kept around 80 degrees, but a few degrees warmer or cooler is fine. If the room where you intend to keep your pet is cooler than this, then the use of an under tank heat pad is recommended. These provide gentle heat without the

adverse effects of lights outlined above. If heat lights must be used, they should be low wattage, and be of the nocturnal (red or purple) variety.

Substrate and Furnishings

The substrate used for rose hair tarantulas should be one that is free of inorganic contaminants, and that will hold enough moisture to support a burrow. Peat moss, bed-a-beast, orchid bark, and sandy soil are good choices. Some hobbyists have found vermiculite to be an acceptable alternative, but the jury is still out regarding the potential harm caused by ingested vermiculite.

The bedding should be at least 3 inches deep, and kept just moist enough to clump when pinched, but it should never drip. A small piece of cork bark or a small half-log should be included as a starting place for your tarantula to dig its burrow below.

Additional decorations such as live or fake plants, sticks, and rocks may be used as well. However, make sure that anything even remotely heavy is placed firmly on the cage bottom before the bedding is added. Otherwise, your pet may burrow under said item, only to have it fall and crush them.

Water and Humidity

A small, shallow water dish should always be present. Some sources indicate that standing water is not necessary, as the tarantulas will ignore it. However, I have found that for long term success, it doesn't hurt to include it.

Humidity levels inside the cage will vary, but within the tarantulas burrow, levels of at least 70% should be maintained. If the substrate remains moist enough to hold the form of a burrow, then the humidity within the burrow is likely fine.

The entire enclosure should be misted every few days to maintain the substrate and humidity levels as outlined earlier.

Nutrition

Rose hair tarantulas will eat a wide variety of invertebrate prey, as well as the occasional pinky mouse. Crickets, mealworms, waxworms, and roaches should all be included in a balanced diet for this species. Additional supplementation of the prey items is not required, but the food items should be gut-loaded prior to being fed off. Gut loading is the process of feeding prey a variety of nutritious foods prior to being consumed themselves. This ensures that your tarantula gets all of the vitamins and minerals that it needs.

These tarantulas will eat 3 to 5 large crickets a week, or a similar amount of other prey items. Food should be offered at least twice a week, and uneaten prey should be removed after 24 hours. Some rose hairs will eat more, and some will eat less. It is not uncommon for them to gorge themselves for several feedings and then to fast for up to a month.

Handling

Rose hairs are among the most docile and even-tempered of all tarantula species. However, as with any tarantula, it should be remembered that rose hairs are venomous, even if only slightly so. Most humans suffer no systemic effects from a rose hair bite, instead experiencing localized pain, itching, and burning. Unfortunately, every person will react differently, and you will not know if you have a problem until after the fact.