



CARE INFORMATION SHEET

GIANT AFRICAN LAND SNAIL (*achatina sp.*)

Giant African land snails are molluscs which can attain a size of 20cm, they can live for several years and are easy to care for, they make interesting and unusual pets.

Housing

Giant snails can be kept in a glass or plastic aquarium tank, which will be easy to clean. The snails will live happily either singly or in a small group of similar sized snails, however it is important to consider that if you keep more than one in the same tank, they will breed and will produce large numbers of eggs at regular intervals. This is fine if you are confident that you can find homes for the young, otherwise you will need to destroy the eggs. It is NEVER acceptable, or even legal, to release these animals into the wild. Some pet shops will take youngsters off your hands, and some lizard owners may use them as a food source for their pets.

Snails like to burrow, so put a substrate of peat-free compost in the bottom of the tank, to a depth of a few inches. Provide drinking water in a heavy bowl which the snails will not be able to tip over easily.

Temperature and humidity

Keep the tank at 20 – 25c, avoiding extremes of heat and cold. If you keep the tank in a room which is generally comfortably warm, you should be able to maintain ideal temperatures without any additional heat source. However in cold winter conditions you may need to provide warmth by using a heat mat underneath the tank. Keep the substrate damp and humid, you can do this by misting daily with water using a plant spray bottle (take care to use one which has not been used to spray any kind of chemical.)

Feeding

Snails will eat a variety of different foods including the following :-

Fruits including apple, orange, kiwi, strawberry, mango, tomato, banana, pear, grapes, melon

Vegetables including potato, lettuce, cabbage, turnip, pumpkin, squash, courgette, cauliflower, peas, sweetcorn, broccoli

Other foods include digestive biscuits, dog biscuits, bread, dandelion leaves

Be sure to remove any uneaten food which is going off.

Snails require additional calcium which can be provided by placing a cuttlefish bone in the tank, you will need to replace this at regular intervals as the snails will steadily munch away on it.

General care advice

These are very easy animals to care for and provided that they have the correct living conditions they should have few health problems.

If you notice that your snail has withdrawn into its shell and has sealed the shell opening, this is a sure sign that there is something wrong with the set-up, and you need to check the temperature, humidity and feeding. Once you have put it right, you can encourage the snail to become active again by gently bathing it in lukewarm water.

Do not be alarmed if you notice a small white lump to the side of the head, this is the opening to the snail's reproductive organs.

Occasionally the snail's shell may break slightly at the growth point, this will usually resolve itself. Be careful when handling snails to ensure that you don't drop them and cause shell damage. If the shell does become cracked, the snail may well survive and recover, depending on the severity of the damage, if you are unsure seek the advice of a vet.

BREEDING

Giant African snails are hermaphrodite and possess both male and female reproductive organs, this means that if you have two or more snails, they will breed with each other, and it will not matter which one is him or her as they can be either. They will reach breeding age at around 9 months old, and will produce large numbers of small, round, white eggs in nests in the substrate. If you want the eggs to hatch you can carefully remove them so that the adults don't crush them, and place them in a separate container with the same conditions as the main housing tank. The eggs will hatch after around 14 days and the babies can be fed immediately and given cuttlefish bone to help their growth. They will grow quickly and will consume large amounts of food.

If you do not wish to keep any of the young, destroy the eggs by freezing them before throwing them away. Under no circumstances should you allow any possible release of these creatures into the wild. If you do not destroy the eggs, and merely throw them away, they will hatch in the rubbish. Please consider carefully the consequences of indiscriminate breeding, and destroy any eggs properly if you do not wish to keep the offspring.