

REARING CRICKETS

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Crickets are relatively easy to raise and provide good for fish bait or food for some pets. The house cricket, commonly sold in bait stores, is light tan with dark markings. This insect was brought to the US from Europe.

REARING

Start with crickets from a dealer. It takes only about 25 healthy, active crickets to start a colony. About half should be males and half females. A very long egg-laying tube at the end of the abdomen makes females easy to recognize. Crickets can be reared in metal containers such as garbage cans, lard cans, or metal-lined boxes. Containers that are about 2' deep and 15" wide can hold about 200 crickets. Escape of crickets can be prevented by applying a thin, 8" to 9" wide coating of light oil or petroleum jelly at the inside top of the container.

Place 4" to 6" diameter dish of clean, damp sand, about 1/2" deep in the bottom of the cage; eggs can be laid there. Some people prefer sawdust instead of sand because it holds moisture better. However, sawdust can contain small insects that can become a problem. Keep small paper cylinders such as empty paper towel rolls in the cage to provide hiding places and protection for the young crickets.

FOOD AND WATER

Chicken laying mash is a very good food. About two pounds of mash will feed 100 crickets. Keep food away from the water source so that it will remain dry. This will prevent problems with mold and grain mites. Provide a continuous supply of water with a chick waterer or large vials plugged with cotton. Fill the chick waterer saucer with cotton so small crickets are kept from drowning.

DEVELOPMENT

Crickets undergo incomplete metamorphosis with three distinct stages - egg, nymph, and adult. Nymphs look like the adults but are smaller and do not have fully developed wings.

Development from egg to adult takes about three months. Eggs hatch in about three weeks and crickets are large enough to use in another month. Since they are cold-blooded, their development rate can be sped up or slowed down to some extent by adjusting the temperature at which they are reared. For best cricket reproduction and growth, keep the rearing container at 85°F. by suspending a lighted bulb inside the

container. A few trials with bulbs of different wattage and raising and lowering the bulb will give the proper heating requirements. Cricket rearing may be slowed down or stopped entirely by lowering the temperature to about 50°F.

MAINTENANCE TIPS

T Keep the material in the bottom of the cage dry. The egg-laying containers should be the only moist area in the cage. This vital to keep mites and other potential problems under control.

T Good sanitation is essential. Inspect cages frequently and remove dead crickets regularly.

T Remove egg-laying containers regularly and transfer them to new cages. This will keep crickets of about the same size together.

T At least once a month remove the crickets and wash each cage with soap and hot water. Rinse thoroughly and dry completely. Several hours of sun drying is preferable.

T Keep at least two separate colonies to reduce the chances of disease wiping out all of your insects. Do not use insecticides around your crickets. They are very susceptible to these products.

T Do not add wild crickets to your colony. They may be carrying diseases or parasites.

T Store bulk feed in sealed containers to reduce the chance of problems with stored product insects.

T The legs of tables holding cricket cages and colonies can be set in small cans with a little oil in the bottom. This will keep ants and other climbing insects from reaching the cages.

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