

Giant African Land Snail care sheet

The Giant African Land Snails (*Achatina* sp.) are molluscs and make ideal pets as they are easy to look after. They can live for several years and grow up to 20cm in length. The snails are most active during the night (they are nocturnal).

Housing

These snails can be housed in a variety of containers, depending upon the size and number of snails that you have. A good container is a glass or plastic aquarium tank. These type of containers allow easy cleaning and you will be able to watch your snails through the sides. The snails like to burrow, so when you have your tank, fill it with several centimetres of peat-free compost and a large piece of bark. (If you collect the bark yourself make sure that you soak it in water overnight to remove any nasty chemicals). Make sure that the substrate is kept moist at all times, but not soggy. Leaf litter and moss are also good at keeping the soil damp. The tank should be kept at 20-25°C, which means that a small heat mat or pad is necessary during the winter months. The tank should be kept moist and a plant spray is ideal, providing it hasn't been used with chemicals as these could harm your snails.

If snails are not kept in correct conditions they may seal the aperture (opening) to their shell and wait for conditions to improve. If this happens you should make sure you are keeping the snails correctly. Once you have resolved these housing issues you can encourage the snails to open up again by bathing them in lukewarm water.

Feeding

The African Land Snails are very easy to feed, as they will eat a wide variety of things. The best food is lettuce and cucumber but apple, banana and cabbage can also be given. However, if you give your snails food that goes off quickly (like banana and apple) be sure to remove it when it has gone brown so as not to make your snails ill. An essential part of the snail's diet is calcium. This is used to keep their shells strong and healthy and calcium can be provided in the form of a cuttlefish bone.

Breeding

All snails are hermaphrodites, which means that they have both male and female sex organs, so although you need two snails in order for them to breed, it doesn't matter which two. If conditions are ideal, the snails will produce nests of small, white round eggs. These should be removed very carefully, so that the adults do not disturb them, and placed in a small container containing some damp peat-free substrate, where they should hatch after about 14 days at 20-25°C. Keep an eye on your eggs, and as soon as they hatch give them some food and cuttlefish.

Snails can produce more than one clutch of eggs following mating. As a result, snails that have not have been in contact with other snails for some time may still produce batches of viable eggs (assuming the snail was an adult when it was in contact with other snails).

Health and cleanliness

Giant Land Snails should be treated with the same care and attention to cleanliness as any other pet. Like many animals (caged birds, snakes, terrapins, tortoises, lizards etc.) and some food products (raw poultry and eggs), snails can carry the *Salmonella* bacteria.

Consequently, after handling snails (or cleaning them out), you should **wash and disinfect hands** thoroughly.

The above does not constitute medical advice. If you are in any way concerned about health risks posed by snails then seek advice from a medical practitioner.

Other information

In some countries it is illegal to own Giant African Land Snails because of the invasive nature of this snail. There are currently no restrictions on owning these snails in the UK but it is illegal to release them (including eggs) into the wild. Excess eggs should be frozen before being disposed of.

Remember: it is important that you know the needs and requirements of your pet before you obtain the animal. You should never, ever obtain an animal before researching its needs and preparing the housing and conditions.