All you need to know about keeping and breeding tarantulas: housing, feeding, determining sex, breeding, raising spiderlings and much more.
The Proper Care of Tarantulas

www.spidersalive.co.za

Scientific Classification:

Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Arthropoda
Class: Arachnida
Order: Araneae
Suborder: Mygalomorphae
Superfamily: Theraphosioidea
Family: Theraphosidae
Subfamilies: There are 13 subfamilies of tarantula
Genera: There are 113 genera of tarantula
Species: There are 897 species of tarantula

Tarantulas are found in North and South America, Europe, Australia, Africa and Southern Asia. In Africa, tarantulas are described as Baboon Spiders. A tarantula’s habitat ranges from tropical rainforests to the desert. Some species live in silk lined burrow in the ground while others make aerial silk nests in trees.
Tarantulas vary in size with body lengths between 2.5 cm and 10 cm (1-4 in) and leg spans of between 8 and 30 cm (3-12 in).

All tarantulas are venomous however only a few species are considered harmful to humans. The bite of a tarantula however can be VERY painful – so don’t get bitten.

There are nearly 900 species of Tarantulas described. Many species of tarantula have been bred in captivity and are available in the pet trade around the world. Some countries do not allow importation of exotic tarantulas as well as not allow the trade of their indigenous tarantulas – it is your responsibility to know the law in your country.

Tarantulas are categorized into New World and Old World. New World tarantulas are found in North and South America (Western hemisphere) and have urticating hairs. Old World tarantulas are found in the Eastern hemisphere. Old World Tarantulas do not have urticating hairs but usually compensate for this with an aggressive demeanour.
Tarantula Anatomy:

Posterior View (top):

Ventral View (under):
External Anatomy:

Tarantula’s have a hard cuticle or body shell, called an exoskeleton. The exoskeleton covers the cephalothorax and legs and prevents the spider from losing moisture and drying out. The exoskeleton also provides the tarantula with structural support. The exoskeleton is shed as the tarantula grows.

Sensory system:

Sight:

Tarantulas can sense their environment to a degree through their simple eyes.
Hairs:

Another way that they sense their environment is through touch. This is achieved through a number of modified hairs covering the entire body, all with specific functions. These hairs are connected to nerves internally.

Hairs on the lower limbs called trichobothria help with orientation, detecting the faintest of air currents.

Hairs on the feet called scopulae help to hold on to a surface, like glass.

Hairs on the abdomen called urticating hairs assist with defence. Urticating hairs are detachable hairs on the abdomen that are flicked off by the hind legs in defence.

This Haitian brown tarantula has flicked off some of its urticating hairs on its abdomen, leaving a bald spot. Urticating hairs can be dangerous if breathed in and if you get them in your eyes. Care needs to be taken when working with tarantulas with urticating hairs.

A tarantula's body is divided into two parts:

Cephalothrox / Prosoma

Abdomen / Opisthosa

Prosoma:
Externally the prosoma comprises of the eight legs, the two chelicerae with their hollow fangs, eyes and the pedipalps. Internally comprises of the nervous centre and venom glands.

**Eyes:**

![Simple eyes](image1)

Tarantula’s have 8 eyes and can detect polarised light which helps them to orientate themselves. The eyes of a tarantula are simple eyes, meaning there is just a single lens to each eye. Tarantula eyes are arranged in two rows of four, just back from the chelicerae.

**Pedipalps:**

![Pedipalps](image2)

Tarantula’s have two appendages near their mouths called pedipalps which are used to manipulate their prey while feeding. The palps of immature males are expanded and look like boxing gloves. As the male matures the pedipalps are transformed into highly complex organs that are used to inseminate females. The female's pedipalps are slender.
Legs:

We all know that tarantulas have 8 legs. Each leg is divided into 7 segments. The seven segments of a tarantula’s leg make them very flexible. Tarantulas have muscles that bend the legs closer to the body but not away from the body. Each time a tarantula needs to stretch a leg back out, it must pump fluid into that leg.

To bend the leg back, pressure is relaxed and the fluid flows out of the leg as the muscles do their work. This resembles a hose getting stiff as it fills with water and the pressure builds and goes limp when the pressure drops and water is released.

So spiders extend their legs by changes in body fluid pressures. This is why when a spider doesn’t receive enough fluid that its legs fold in toward the body.

Chelicerae:

The chelicerae are two single segment appendages that are located just below the eyes and directly forward of the mouth. The chelicerae contain the venom glands that vent through the fangs. The chelicerae of tarantulas completely contain the venom glands and the muscles that surround them.

Fangs:

The fangs are hollow extensions of the chelicerae that inject venom into prey that the tarantula bites. The fangs are also used to masticate (chew). The fangs are positioned so that they can extend downward and outward in preparation to bite. They can also fold back toward the chelicerae.
Opisthosoma:

The opisthosoma or abdomen internally contains the respiratory organs (book lungs), reproductive organs, silk glands, the heart and part of the digestive tract. The abdomen is also covered externally by urticating hairs.

Urticating hairs:

New-world tarantulas (found in North and South America) are equipped with these hairs on their abdomen. Tarantulas throw these hairs which are barbed as a first line of defence. They do this by rubbing their legs against their abdomen. These hairs irritate sensitive areas of the body, such as the mucous membrane if inhaled. Some species have urticating hairs that can penetrate surfaces such as the cornea of the eye. Care needs to be taken when dealing with these tarantulas.

Internal Anatomy:

Tarantulas also have an internal skeleton that is actually an extension of the external exoskeleton. This internal skeleton serves as a surface for muscle attachment.

Nervous system:

The Tarantula’s nervous centre is found in the prosoma or cephalorthorax. It essentially is made up of two collections nerve cell bodies (ganglia). Nerve fibres branch off from these ganglia and connect to the various organs internally. The ganglia act as relay message centres between the organs and the body.
**Respiratory system:**

Respiration in tarantulas is achieved through book lungs. Tarantulas have 4 book lungs. Each lung consists of 15 or more thin sheets of folded tissue arranged like the pages of a book, in a cavity. These sheets of tissue are supplied by blood vessels. Air enters the cavity through a tiny slit on each side of and near the front of the abdomen. As air enters each lung, oxygen is taken into the blood stream through the blood vessels in the lungs. Much needed moisture may also be absorbed from humid air in the same fashion.

![Tarantula Shed showing vital structure location e.g. Book Lung openings.](image)

**Circulatory system:**

A tarantula’s circulatory system is very different to that of a human. Tarantula’s blood is also very different. A tarantula’s blood is a liquid called hemolymph. The tarantula’s heart is a long slender tube that is located along the top of the opisthosoma or abdomen. The heart is neurogenic and so nerve cells initiate and coordinate the heart. The heart pumps hemolymph to all parts of the body through open passages called sinuses. If the exoskeleton is damaged, loss of hemolymph will kill the tarantula unless the wound is small enough that the hemolymph can dry and close the wound.
Digestive system:
The mouth is located on the under part of the prosoma, under the chelicerae. The mouth is a small straw-shaped opening that can only suck. This means that any food taken in needs to be in liquid form. The chelicerae secrete digestive juices through openings that aid in the break down (predigestion) of the prey. The stomach of a tarantula runs the entire length of the body, however what is called the sucking stomach is located in the prosoma. Muscles surround the sucking stomach and when these muscles contract, this causes a sucking action and the tarantula is able to ingest the liquefied prey which enters through the mouth and then moves to the intestines. The liquefied prey is further broken down in the intestines and passed into the hemolymph where it is distributed to the entire body. The remains of the liquefied prey are formed into a little ball which the tarantula will discard in a particular area. This should be removed regularly to prevent mould and fungus forming. Excrement is voided through the anus.

Silk glands:
At least three different silk glands can be found in the tarantula's abdomen. The silk is liquid inside the gland. When the silk is excreted through the spinnerets, it changes into a solid. Tarantulas typically have 2 or 4 spinnerets.

Reproductive system:
Both testis and ovaries are paired organs found in the abdomen of the tarantula. Male tarantulas have testis and female tarantulas have ovaries. The external opening that leads to and from the testis and ovaries is called the genital opening or epigastric furrow. Females receive sperm from the male through the epigastric furrow.
Choosing your first tarantula:

Tarantulas **not** considered beginner tarantulas and why:

Some tarantulas are known for their aggression:

Pterinochilus murinus (OBT – Orange Baboon Spider)

Stromatopelma calceatum (Feather leg Baboon Spider)

Ceratogyrus brachycephalus (Horned Baboon Spider)
Some species of tarantula are considered very delicate because of specific habitat requirements:

Some species require very specific habitat conditions. Some species are just considered as very delicate and have been found to die in captivity with no apparent reason.

Some of these species include:

**Goliath Bird Eating Spider**

This spider should be avoided as a beginner as it requires quite high humidity which results in problems with shedding if the desired humidity isn't achieved.

**Avicularia species:**

Avicularia spiderlings are not considered as beginner tarantulas but they are among the most beautiful of the tarantulas so I doubt they will be absent from your collection for long. Some species of Avicularia have been found to die for no apparent reason. This sudden unexplained death is called Sudden Avic Death Syndrome. They are beautiful tarantulas though.
Some tarantula species have been found to have strong venom.

Obviously the idea is to never get bitten when keeping tarantulas.

Some species of tarantula whose venom you should take note of are:

Poecilotheria species (Indian Ornamental):

Pterinochilus murinus (OBT)

Stromatopelma calceatum (feather leg baboon spider)

Some species of tarantula are very quick:

If you are not familiar with a quick species of tarantula, before you know it they are out of their enclosure and running around the house somewhere. This could be a serious problem for someone new to the hobby. Some species that are particularly quick include:

Poecilotheria species (Indian Ornamental)

Avicularia species (Pink Toe)

Pterinochilus murinus (OBT)

Stromatopelma calceatum (Feather leg baboon spider)
The following species are widely kept and considered good beginner - intermediate tarantulas:

![Tarantula Image](image-url)

### Chilean Rose (Grammostola rosea)

The Chilean Rose Tarantula is one of the most commonly traded tarantulas in the pet trade today. This species of tarantula is popular because it is a combination of being fairly large, hardy and docile. The Chilean Rose Tarantula is readily available and can be found in two different colour phases:

1. tan to brown overall colour with pink hairs and a pink carapace
2. red hairs all over the body.

The Chilean Rose Tarantula is considered the best starter species for anybody who wants to get into the hobby of keeping tarantulas.

- **Range**: Bolivia, Northern Chile, and Argentina, found in many habitats, mostly deserts and scrubland.
- **Type**: Terrestrial.
- **Diet**: Spiderlings can be fed on pinhead crickets and other small insects. Adults can be fed on large crickets and other large insects, as well as an occasional pinkie mouse.
- **Full Grown Size**: 11.5cm – 14cm (4.5 - 5.5 inches).
- **Growth**: Relatively slow. Juveniles shed often though.
- **Temperature**: 21 – 29 C (70 - 85° F).
- **Humidity**: 75 to 80%.
- **Temperament**: Docile.
- **Housing**: Spiderlings can live in a clear plastic container with air holes. Adults can live in a 1ft (10-gallon) tank. Floor space is more important than height.
- **Substrate**: 5-7.5cm (2 to 3 inches) of peat.
- **Decor**: No decorations are really needed, but you can add plastic plants and driftwood.
- **Common Name**: Chilean Rose Haired Tarantula.
- **Lifespan**: Females: 15 years +; Males generally live less than half that of female.
Costa Rican Zebra (Aphonopelma seemani)

This spider originates from Costa Rica where it lives in deep burrows in the tropical rainforest. The abdomen is usually a brown to black colour with russet hairs. The legs are dark brown to black with distinct longitudinal cream lines down the legs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Range</strong></td>
<td>Can be found in most of Costa Rica as well as Nicaragua and Guatemala.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type</strong></td>
<td>Terrestrial, deep burrower.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Diet</strong></td>
<td>Spiderlings can be fed on pinhead crickets and other small insects. Adults can be fed on large crickets and other large insects, as well as an occasional pinkie mouse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Full Grown Size</strong></td>
<td>10cm – 13cm (4 - 4.5 inches).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Growth</strong></td>
<td>Relatively quick.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Temperature</strong></td>
<td>26 C (78 ° F).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Humidity</strong></td>
<td>80%. Humidity must not fall below 75%. Sub-adults – adults may drink from a shallow, wide water dish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Temperament</strong></td>
<td>Fair.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Housing</strong></td>
<td>Spiderlings can live in a clear plastic container with air holes. Adults can live in a 1ft (10-gallon) tank. Floor space is more important than height.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Substrate</strong></td>
<td>At least 7.5cm (3 inches) of peat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Decor</strong></td>
<td>No decorations are really needed, but you can add plastic plants and driftwood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Common Name</strong></td>
<td>Costa Rican Zebra.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lifespan</strong></td>
<td>Females 15 years +; Males generally live less than half that of female.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mexican Red Knee (Brachypelma smithi)

The Mexican red knee tarantula was the first tarantula to enter the pet trade. This tarantula is by far the most popular of all the tarantulas. The combination of beautiful colours, large size and docile temperament makes this tarantula a must have for any collector.

**Range**
Pacific side of Mexico. Scrubland to desert habitat.

**Type**
Terrestrial.

**Diet**
Spiderlings can be fed on pinhead crickets and other small insects. Adults can be fed on large crickets and other large insects, as well as an occasional pinkie mouse.

**Full Grown Size**
13cm – 16cm (5 - 5.5 inches).

**Growth**
Slow.

**Temperature**
24 - 32 C (75 – 90 F).

**Humidity**
75 - 80%.

**Temperament**
Docile.

**Housing**
Spiderlings can live in a clear plastic container with air holes. Adults can live in a 1ft (10-gallon) tank. Floor space is more important than height.

**Substrate**
At least 5 - 7.5cm (2 - 3 inches) of peat.

**Decor**
No decorations are really needed, but you can add plastic plants and driftwood.

**Common Name**
Mexican Red Knee.

**Lifespan**
Females: 20 years + ; Males generally live less than half that of female.
**Mexican Red Leg (Brachypelma emilia)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Range</strong></th>
<th>Pacific side of Mexico. Scrubland to desert habitat.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type</strong></td>
<td>Terrestrial.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Diet</strong></td>
<td>Spiderlings can be fed on pinhead crickets and other small insects. Adults can be fed on large crickets and other large insects, as well as an occasional pinkie mouse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Full Grown Size</strong></td>
<td>13cm – 16cm (5 - 5.5 inches).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Growth</strong></td>
<td>Slow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Temperature</strong></td>
<td>24 - 32 C (75 – 90 F).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Humidity</strong></td>
<td>75 - 80%.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Temperament</strong></td>
<td>Docile.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Housing</strong></td>
<td>Spiderlings can live in a clear plastic container with air holes. Adults can live in a 1ft (10-gallon) tank. Floor space is more important than height.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Substrate</strong></td>
<td>At least 5 - 7.5cm (2 - 3 inches) of peat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Decor</strong></td>
<td>No decorations are really needed, but you can add plastic plants and driftwood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Common Name</strong></td>
<td>Mexican Red Knee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lifespan</strong></td>
<td>Females: 20 years + ; Males generally live less than half that of female.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mexican Blonde (Aphonopelma chalcodes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Range</strong></th>
<th>Southern Arizona and Northern Mexico.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type</strong></td>
<td>Terrestrial.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Diet</strong></td>
<td>Spiderlings can be fed on pinhead crickets and other small insects. Adults can be fed on large crickets and other large insects, as well as an occasional pinkie mouse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Full Grown Size</strong></td>
<td>15cm (6 inches).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Growth</strong></td>
<td>Slow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Temperature</strong></td>
<td>24 - 27 C (75 – 80 F).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Humidity</strong></td>
<td>65 - 70%.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sub-adults – adults may drink from a shallow, wide water dish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Temperament</strong></td>
<td>Fair. Slightly more aggressive than other beginner species.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Housing</strong></td>
<td>Spiderlings can live in a clear plastic container with air holes. Adults can live in a 1ft (10-gallon) tank. Floor space is more important than height.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Substrate</strong></td>
<td>7.5cm (3 inches) of peat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Decor</strong></td>
<td>No decorations are really needed, but you can add plastic plants and driftwood. Flower pot can be used for a hide. This species has been known to construct deep burrows in the substrate in captivity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Common Name</strong></td>
<td>Mexican Blonde.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lifespan</strong></td>
<td>Females: 20 years + ; Males generally live less than half that of female.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Curly Hair (Brachypelma albopilosum)

Curly hair Tarantulas have gold and tan hairs covering their bodies. The legs are a darker brown, in contrast to the practically bronze carapace. The whole spider is covered in curly hairs – hence the name. Its large size and docile temperament makes it a great beginner tarantula.

Range  
Forests of Central America.

Type  
Terrestrial.

Diet  
Spiderlings can be fed on pinhead crickets and other small insects. Adults can be fed on large crickets and other large insects, as well as an occasional pinkie mouse.

Full Grown Size  
13cm – 16cm (5 - 5.5 inches).

Growth  
Slow.

Temperature  
21 - 29 C (7 – 85 F).

Humidity  
75 - 80%.

Temperament  
Docile.

Housing  
Spiderlings can live in a clear plastic container with air holes. Adults can live in a 1ft (10-gallon) tank. Floor space is more important than height.

Substrate  
At least 5 - 7.5cm (2 - 3 inches) of peat.

Decor  
No decorations are really needed, but you can add plastic plants and driftwood. Flower pot can be used as a hide.

Common Name  
Honduran Curly Hair.

Lifespan  
Females: 10 years + ; Males generally live less than half that of female.
Red Rump (Brachypelma vagans)

This tarantula is native to Mexico and is frequently found in Belize, El Salvador and Guatemala, where it can be found in deep burrows. Strikingly red hairs cover the abdomen and the rest of the tarantula is covered in black hairs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Belize, El Salvador and Guatemala.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Terrestrial. Scrubland.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diet</td>
<td>Spiderlings can be fed on pinhead crickets and other small insects. Adults can be fed on large crickets and other large insects, as well as an occasional pinkie mouse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Grown Size</td>
<td>13cm (5 inches).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth</td>
<td>Slow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temperature</td>
<td>24 - 27 C (75 - 80 F).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humidity</td>
<td>75 - 85%.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-adults – adults may drink from a shallow, wide water dish.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temperament</td>
<td>Can be skittish and aggressive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>Spiderlings can live in a clear plastic container with air holes. Adults can live in a 1ft (10-gallon) tank. Floor space is more important than height.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substrate</td>
<td>At least 10 - 15cm (4 - 6 inches) of peat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decor</td>
<td>No decorations are really needed, but you can add plastic plants and driftwood. Flower pot can be used as a hide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Name</td>
<td>Red Rump.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifespan</td>
<td>Females: 15 years +; Males generally live less than half that of female.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Green Bottle Blue Tarantula (Chromatopelma cyaneopubescens)

The green bottle blue tarantula is one of the prettiest species of tarantula available in the pet trade. This tarantula is resilient and easy to keep and it can tolerate a wider temperature range and lower humidity levels than most South American species.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Northern Venezuela.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Terrestrial. Scrubland.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diet</td>
<td>Spiderlings can be fed on pinhead crickets and other small insects. Adults can be fed on large crickets and other large insects, as well as an occasional pinkie mouse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Grown Size</td>
<td>10-13cm (4-4.5 inches).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth</td>
<td>Medium.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temperature</td>
<td>21-29°C (70-85°F).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humidity</td>
<td>65-75%.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temperament</td>
<td>Semi-docile and skittish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>Spiderlings can live in a clear plastic container with air holes. Adults can live in a 1ft (10-gallon) tank. Floor space is more important than height.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substrate</td>
<td>5-7.5cm (2-3 inches) of peat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decor</td>
<td>No decorations are really needed, but you can add plastic plants and driftwood. Flower pot can be used as a hide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Name</td>
<td>Green Bottle Blue tarantula.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifespan</td>
<td>Female: 20 years +; Males 5-9 years.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
White Knee (Acanthoscurria geniculata)

Range  
Forests of Northern Brazil.

Type  
Terrestrial.

Diet  
Spiderlings can be fed on pinhead crickets and other small insects. Adults can be fed on large crickets and other large insects, as well as an occasional pinkie mouse.

Full Grown Size  
20cm (8 inches).

Growth  
Fast growth.

Temperature  
25 - 29 C (80 - 85 F).

Humidity  
75 - 80%.
Sub-adults – adults may drink from a shallow, wide water dish.

Temperament  
Semi-aggressive.

Housing  
Spiderlings can live in a clear plastic container with air holes. Adults can live in a 1ft (10-gallon) tank. Floor space is more important than height.

Substrate  
7.5cm – 10cm (3 -4 inches) of peat.

Decor  
No decorations are really needed, but you can add plastic plants and driftwood. Flower pot can be used as a hide.

Common Name  
Brazilian White Knee.

Lifespan  
Female: 20 years + ; Male 8 – 10 years.
Chaco Golden Knee (Grammostola pulchripes)

The Chaco Golden Knee tends to be one of the more docile and calm species of tarantula and therefore makes a great beginners tarantula. This tarantula is an opportunistic burrowing terrestrial tarantula. They tend to burrow while younger and adopt a pre-existing hide as its home when it begins to mature. This tarantula has long light-colored hairs all over its body and gold stripes on its "knees".

**Range**
Native to South American countries Argentina and Paraguay.

**Type**
Terrestrial. Burrower.

**Diet**
Spiderlings can be fed on pinhead crickets and other small insects. Adults can be fed on large crickets and other large insects, as well as an occasional pinkie mouse.

**Full Grown Size**
20cm (8 inches).

**Growth**
Medium.

**Temperature**
21 - 27 °C (70 - 80 °F).

**Humidity**
60 - 70%.

Sub-adults – adults may drink from a shallow, wide water dish.

**Temperament**
Docile.

**Housing**
Spiderlings can live in a clear plastic container with air holes. Adults can live in a 1ft (10-gallon) tank. Floor space is more important than height.

**Substrate**
7.5cm – 10cm (3 - 4 inches) of peat.

**Decor**
No decorations are really needed, but you can add plastic plants and driftwood. Flower pot can be used as a hide.

**Common Name**
Golden Knee.

**Lifespan**
Female: 15 – 25 years; Males generally live less than half that of female.
Brazilian Salmon Pink (Lasiodora parahybana)

The Brazilian Salmon Pink Birdeater is one of the largest species of tarantula in the world. They are robust and active. This tarantula grows fast, attaining lengths of 15cm (6 inches) in one year. This tarantula is a must for any collection.

**Range**
Tropical Rainforests of Eastern Brazil.

**Type**
Terrestrial.

**Diet**
Spiderlings can be fed on pinhead crickets and other small insects. Adults can be fed on large crickets and other large insects, as well as an occasional pinkie mouse.

**Full Grown Size**
17.5cm – 25cm (7.5 – 10 inches).

**Growth**
Fast.

**Temperature**
24 - 29 C (75 - 85 F).

**Humidity**
75 - 80%.
Sub-adults – adults may drink from a shallow, wide water dish.

**Temperament**
Semi-aggressive.

**Housing**
Spiderlings can live in a clear plastic container with air holes. Adults can live in a 2ft (20 gallon) tank. Floor space is more important than height.

**Substrate**
7.5cm – 12.5cm (3 - 5 inches) of peat.

**Decor**
No decorations are really needed, but you can add plastic plants and driftwood. Flower pot can be used as a hide.

**Common Name**
Brazilian Salmon Pink.

**Lifespan**
Females: 15 years + ; Males generally live less than half that of female.
**Antilles Pinktoe Tarantula (Avicularia Versicolor)**

This is one of the most beautiful tarantulas available in the pet trade. This spider has colours of greens, oranges, reds and even purple. This species of tarantula is docile but skittish and can run quick if startled.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Range</strong></th>
<th>Tropical areas of Martinique,</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type</strong></td>
<td>Arboreal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Diet</strong></td>
<td>Spiderlings can be fed on pinhead crickets and other small insects. Adults can be fed on large crickets and other large insects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Full Grown Size</strong></td>
<td>12cm - 15cm (5-6 inches)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Growth</strong></td>
<td>Medium - Fast.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Temperature</strong></td>
<td>24 - 27 C (75 - 80 F).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Humidity</strong></td>
<td>75 - 80%. Mist enclosure often. Ensure good ventilation. Sub-adults – adults may drink from a shallow, wide water dish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Temperament</strong></td>
<td>Docile but skittish. Can run quick.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Housing</strong></td>
<td>Spiderlings can live in a clear plastic container with air holes. Adults can live in a 2ft (20 gallon) tank. Height is more important that floor area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Substrate</strong></td>
<td>5 – 7.5cm (2 - 3 inches) of peat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Decor</strong></td>
<td>Provide lots of plastic plants to make webs between. Provide piece of hollow bark and stand it upright in enclosure so spider can make web behind it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Common Name</strong></td>
<td>Versicolor tarantula.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lifespan</strong></td>
<td>Females: roughly 9 years ; Males roughly 3 years. Males die shortly after maturing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pinktoe Tarantula (Avicularia avicularia)

Commonly known as a Pinktoe tarantula, this is a beautiful tarantula that presents colours like dark blues/greens and purple. This is a relatively docile spider but can be quick. This tarantula can also be kept socially if the enclosure is large enough and well decorated.

| **Range** | Throughout the Amazon Basin. Tropical areas of Brazil, Guyana and French Guyana, Trinidad, Surinam as well as Venezuela. |
| **Type** | Arboreal. |
| **Diet** | Spiderlings can be fed on pinhead crickets and other small insects. Adults can be fed on large crickets and other large insects. |
| **Full Grown Size** | 12.5cm (5 inches) |
| **Growth** | Medium - Fast. |
| **Temperature** | 24 - 27°C (75 - 80°F). |
| **Humidity** | 80 – 82%. Mist enclosure often. Ensure good ventilation. Sub-adults – adults may drink from a shallow, wide water dish. |
| **Temperament** | Docile and quick. |
| **Housing** | Spiderlings can live in a clear plastic container with air holes. Adults can live in a 2ft (20 gallon) tank. Height is more important that floor area. If you are planning to keep specimens communally then you might want to consider a 4ft (40 gallon) tank or bigger. If specimens are the same size cannibalism shouldn't occur. |
| **Substrate** | 5 – 7.5cm (2 - 3 inches) of peat. |
| **Decor** | Provide lots of plastic plants (broad-leaved) to make webs between. Provide piece of hollow bark and stand it upright in enclosure so spider can make web behind it. |
| **Common Name** | Pinktoe tarantula. |
| **Lifespan** | Females: roughly 9 years; Males roughly 3 years. Males die shortly after maturing. |
A healthy tarantula is alert, walks properly, has all its legs, doesn’t have parasites and has a fat abdomen. Be sure to check these things before you buy a tarantula. Females far outlive males. Once a male is sexually mature (has spurs and swollen pedipalps), all he wants to do is mate and from that point they don’t live much longer. Female tarantulas have been recorded as living longer than 20 years in captivity. Larger specimens are hardier and easier to care for than spiderlings (slings).

Housing your Tarantula:

Enclosure:

Tarantulas are either arboreal or ground dwelling (burrowing).

Ground dwelling tarantulas, in their natural habitat, live in silk lined burrows which they dig into the ground.

Picture a. Entrance to a tarantula burrow.
Arboreal tarantulas are quicker and more agile. Ground dwelling tarantulas need more surface area than height in their enclosure and arboreal tarantulas need more height than floor area in their enclosure. Your local pet shop should sell a range of different enclosures suitable for tarantulas.

Various sized enclosures suitable for ground dwelling tarantulas.

Enclosure for Arboreal tarantulas.

Substrate:

Peat is a great substrate to use for tarantulas. It retains moisture and so helps to maintain humidity in enclosure. For desert dwelling tarantulas, if you want to more “natural” look, you could also use desert sand. Both peat and desert sand should be sold at your local pet shop.
a. Peat  
b. Desert Sand

The layer of substrate should be a few centimetres thick, particularly with ground dwelling tarantulas as they live in burrows in the wild. By having a thick layer of substrate, this offers the tarantula an opportunity to burrow if it wants. Tarantulas seldom burrow in captivity as they would in the wild.

If you would like to provide your tarantula with a place to hide, then a flower pot turned on its side works well. Juveniles also like to use the centre of a toilet roll to hide in.

Decoration:

A piece of drift wood makes for nice decoration. Chilean Rose enclosure.
Plastic plants are better than live plants. Live plants require specific lighting and they may carry parasites. Mexican Blonde enclosure.

Stones and rocks also make for nice decoration in a tarantula enclosure. Curly Hair enclosure.

Water Bowl:

Red Knee and White Knee Tarantula enclosure. Water bowl present in both enclosures.
Salmon Pink tarantula enclosure. Large water bowl to the left.

Heat:

Most tarantulas like to be kept warm, between 24 – 29°C (75 – 85°F).

Heating Pad from local pet store.

Humidity:

Scrubland tarantulas should have a humidity of between 60 – 70%. Tropical Rainforest tarantulas should have a humidity between 70 and 90%.

Thermometer / Hygrometer from local pet store.
Complete Tarantula Enclosure


Tarantula reproduction:

Spiders will only reproduce if they are sexually mature. Mature males are easy to differentiate from females because their legs are thinner, their bodies are generally smaller and males have two distinguishing features: a spur under the two front legs next to the pedipalp and the last segment of the pedipalps are swollen like boxing gloves.

Male White Knee Tarantula – notice spur under front legs.
Male Haitian Brown Tarantula. Picture shows spur under front legs and swollen pedipalps.

The last segment of the pedipalp is modified in males and is used in the process of reproduction. Males spin a web on the ground onto which they release semen from glands in the abdomen. They then dip their pedipalps into the semen and it is absorbed into the last segment of the pedipalp. The pedipalp is then inserted into the genital opening of the female.

Breeding Tarantulas:

1. Ensure female and male are well fed before you try and mate them. Male is sexually mature when he has spurs on the two front legs next to pedipalps and pedipalps are swollen. A female tarantula is mature when adult size is reached.

2. Wait until female has shed her skin.

3. Then place male into female’s enclosure. Pay careful attention to see if the female is being aggressive toward the male and therefore not receptive. Have a container ready to place over female if she is too aggressive toward the male. Remove male if female is too aggressive and try again a few days later.

4. If the female is receptive, mating can take place in a few seconds to a few hours. Both male and female may act peculiar before they mate (rubbing of legs, drumming of ground etc). Don’t let this behaviour bother you.

5. Remove male from enclosure once he has successfully inserted his pedipalps into the female’s epigastric furrow.
6. You might want to repeat the process of mating a few times spread over a couple of weeks to ensure a successfully breeding.

7. An egg sac should be produced in just over a month from copulation.

8. Females have been known to eat their egg sac if disturbed, so best leave her alone for a while.

9. You can leave the egg sac with the female and let her incubate the eggs or you can incubate the egg sac artificially.

10. The egg sac should hatch in 45 – 90 days (but can take as long as 200 days)

11. If breeding is successful be prepared to house a few hundred to a few thousand spiderlings (depending on the species)

The male makes every effort to push the female backward/upright in order to gain access to the epigastric furrow. Once the abdomen is exposed, the male inserts his pedipalps into the epigastric furrow. The male is the brightly coloured specimen.

Picture a. Male (front) meets female and both tarantulas lift bodies upright.
b. Picture b. Male moves closer to insert pedipalp into epigastric furrow.

c. Picture c. Male (front) meets female and both tarantulas lift bodies upright.
d. Picture d. Male moves closer to insert pedipalp into epigastric furrow.

e. Picture e. Once copulation (mating) is complete, male (to the right) makes a run for it.
Once copulation (mating) is complete, the male makes a rung for it. In some instances, the male might get killed by the female in the process of mating.

Eggs are produced in the ovaries. Fertilized eggs are then released through the genital opening into a cocoon that is spun, called an egg sac.

![Curly Hair tarantula with egg sac.](image)

Tarantulas can produce from a few hundred to a few thousand eggs. The eggs contain yolk which is added when the eggs are first formed and then later when they are fertilized as well. Tarantula eggs can take as long as 200 days to hatch.

![Baby Curly Hair tarantulas inside the egg sac.](image)

**Incubating egg sacs:**

Tarantula egg sacs can either be left with the mother to incubate the eggs or they can be removed and artificially incubated.

If you choose to incubate the egg sac artificially, then you need to keep the egg sac at a temperature of between 27 and 28 degrees C (80 – 82 F). Humidity is also important. Keep the humidity at between 60 and 70%. The other important thing is to turn the egg sac on a regular basis.
Building an incubator:

You can make a home made incubator by using a fish tank, a fish tank heater, some rigid wire mesh and polystyrene. The size of your tank will depend on how many tarantula egg sacs you plan on incubating. I would place the egg sac in an ice cream tub with peat.

A 3ft (90cm) fish tank can hold 4 ice cream tubs length ways and two rows on top of each other.

Bend the rigid wire mesh so it makes a platform to place ice cream tubs on. Place the fish tank heater horizontally on the floor of the fish tank. Silicone sheets of polystyrene on all sides of the tank. Cut a piece of polystyrene for the lid.

Fill tank to just beneath level of platform. Test the heater, setting it at different temperatures until you get a temperature setting that gives you 27-28 C (80-82F) INSIDE the ice cream tub. As the water inside the tank evaporates, this will create humidity – usually a lot higher than 60-70%. This can be lowered by leaving a space open in the lid. Again, you will have to play with this until you get the right measurements.

The testing of humidity and temperature should be done and perfected BEFORE the egg sac is produced.
Housing and growing spiderlings:

Spiderlings can be kept in small containers, even the plastic container they are bought in until they outgrow it.

Plastic enclosure with secure lid sold at local pet shop makes for a great tarantula enclosure.

Peat makes for a great substrate in a tarantula enclosure, particularly with spiderlings as peat retains moisture well and helps increase humidity. A few drops of water on the peat in your spiderlings container should be enough to keep it damp (not wet)

Spiderlings must be kept warm (27 C / 80 F) and relatively humid (60 – 70%).

Spiderlings can be fed on pinhead crickets. Spiderlings will scavenge on dead prey as well. Don't leave uneaten prey in the spiderlings container. Spiderlings can be fed once or twice a week.

Crickets can be bought from your local pet shop.

Spiderlings do not need a water dish as such. Spiderlings will get enough moisture from their prey and from moisture build-up in the container from the moist peat substrate. The container can be misted by spraying a fine mist inside, particularly for tropical tarantulas.

Picture a. Baby Chilean Rose tarantula (sling) in a plastic cup.

Picture b. Slightly older curly hair tarantula. Peat works well as a substrate to keep spiderlings on as it retains moisture. Keep spiderlings warm and humid and they will grow fast.

Tarantula Growth:

Spiderlings will grow quite fast if kept in the right conditions and fed regularly. Spiderlings can shed as often as weekly or biweekly and as they grow it will become a monthly occurrence until they finally reach adulthood where shedding will occur yearly.

![Skins from spiderlings.](www.spidersalive.co.za)

The process of ecdysis (shedding/moulting of exoskeleton):

If you find that your tarantula is on its back in the enclosure, DON’T PANIC. It is not dead, it is probably getting ready to shed. As your tarantula grows, it will need to shed its exoskeleton. The sequence below is of a Costa Rican Zebra Tarantula (Aphonopelma seemani)

![The tarantula will usually spin a web on the floor of the enclosure. The spider then flips itself onto its back as seen in picture a.](www.spidersalive.co.za)
b. The carapace then starts to split as does the abdomen, as seen in picture b.

c. The tarantula then starts to pull itself out of the old exoskeleton as seen in picture c.

d. The process of shedding can take quite some time. This tarantula has started to pull its legs out of the old exoskeleton as seen in picture d.
The process of shedding is almost complete. The new exoskeleton is still soft, as you can see in picture e. The fangs are still white and haven’t hardened.

Picture f. shows the “new” Costa Rican Zebra tarantula a few hours later. The new exoskeleton has begun to harden. Tarantulas are particularly vulnerable while they are shedding and just after because they are unable to defend themselves.