

## BREEDING

Stick insects lay eggs, which hatch out as nymphs, and go through a series of moults before becoming adult. Female adults are generally larger and stockier than males, and typically take longer to mature. In some species the females can reproduce without a male, and for others once a female has been fertilised she will stay fertilised for her entire life.

Eggs are laid in various ways depending on the species; some are just scattered on the floor of the cage, some are buried whilst others are stuck to leaves – so great care should be taken when cleaning your insect's habitat. Stick insects can lay between two eggs per week or 15 per night, depending on the species. Be very careful when cleaning your pet's cage so you don't discard any wanted eggs.

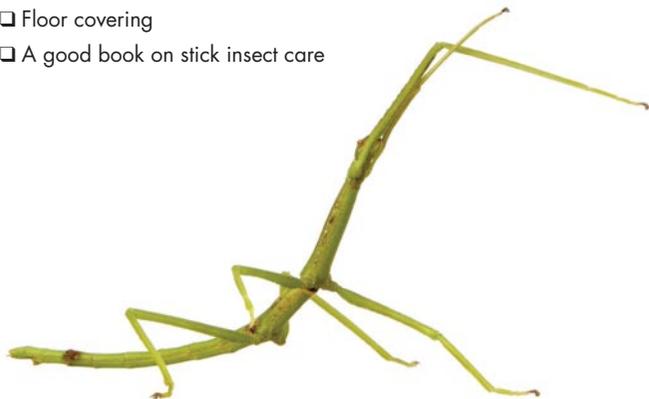
Raising the temperature helps the breeding cycle but it can take from two months to a year before the nymphs emerge.

Remove the eggs from the habitat and place them in a well-ventilated container, keeping them moist and at a maximum temperature of 30°C – but be very careful of mould. Check the eggs regularly to ensure no newly hatched nymphs escape. Once hatched, you can place the nymphs back in the cage with the older stick insects straight away.

As the nymphs grow in size you may have to provide extra accommodation in order to avoid overcrowding. Rearing males at cooler temperatures (15 to 20°C) may help achieve mature specimens of both sexes at the same time.

## SHOPPING LIST

- Vivarium or fine mesh container
- Light bulb
- Thermostat
- Heat pad
- Leaf food – usually bramble
- Water container
- Floor covering
- A good book on stick insect care



The Animal Welfare Act 2006 means all pet owners have a legal duty of care to their pets. Anyone who is cruel to an animal or is found not to be providing the five animal welfare needs, as listed below, can be fined and sent to prison.

### The Five Animal Welfare needs:

1. **Environment:** Pets should be given the correct housing according to its size, this includes shelter, space to exercise and a secure, comfortable place to rest.
2. **Diet:** Pets should be offered the correct type and volume of food to cover all their nutritional needs alongside access to clean, fresh water.
3. **Behaviour:** All pets should be allowed to exhibit normal behaviour patterns and should be provided with the facilities to do so.
4. **Company:** Some animals require the company of their own kind, whilst others should be kept on their own.
5. **Health:** All animals should be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease, and given veterinary treatment if they become sick or injured.



### Remember – you should never release your pet into the wild.

This leaflet is produced by The Pet Charity, a national charity which promotes the joy and benefits of pet ownership.

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The British Veterinary Zoological Society supports the aims of The Pet Charity to secure and enhance the welfare of pet animals. For more information visit [www.bvzs.org](http://www.bvzs.org)

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# GUIDE TO CARING FOR STICK INSECTS



There are approximately 3,000 species of stick insect world-wide and their Latin name, Phasmatodea or Phasmida, comes from the word 'phasmos' meaning 'ghost'.

# THE PET CHARITY GUIDE TO CARING FOR STICK INSECTS

Stick insects are relatively easy to care for and are an ideal first pet for children, under the supervision of an adult. They are usually green or brown in colour and their delicate 'twig' like appearance forms the perfect camouflage, allowing them to 'disappear' into their habitats.

Stick insects may be kept with other stick insects of the same species but overcrowding must be avoided at all cost.

A retailer offering stick insects should be able to offer either eggs, nymphs (immature adults without wings) or adults. It is recommended to begin with nymphs, as eggs can take some time to hatch, and mature adults may only live a few months, if not weeks.

## GENERAL CARE

Stick insects shed their skins at regular intervals as they outgrow them. A stick insect about to shed its skin won't eat for a few days and will hang upside down in its cage. Having moulted for the last time stick insects are approaching the end of their natural lifespan, which can be as short as a couple of months, although some females will survive over six months as adults.

They are generally nocturnal insects, most active at night. Stick insects normally stay healthy throughout their lives if they are kept in the right conditions. If you are worried about the health of your pet seek veterinary advice.

## HOUSING

Before you bring your stick insects home their living quarters should be prepared – always think about security and space.

A converted aquarium, with a specially-fitted ventilated lid, can house several stick insects. It must be tall enough to allow them to hang upside down as they moult. In general, cages should be at least three times as high as an adult kept in it, and should be extended width-wise the more stick insects you have. Your pet shop should be able to advise you on suitable accommodation for your particular species.

Most stick insect species require a temperature of between 17-25°C (63-75°F), although it is recommended to research the ideal temperature for the species you are keeping. A small heat pad, best controlled by a thermostat, placed under the slightly raised housing is the safest and most efficient method of supplying heat. Alternatively, housing can be heated by a heat lamp, but care must be taken to ensure your stick insects cannot touch the lamp, which may result in burns.

## DID YOU KNOW?

In some species the females can reproduce without a male, and for others once a female has been fertilised she will stay fertilised for her entire life.

Newspaper or sheets of plain white paper are easily replaceable as a floor covering. Alternatively, sand, peat or bark chips can be used, especially for species that like to bury their eggs. The floor covering should be changed regularly, taking a great deal of care not to discard any wanted eggs.

## HUMIDITY

The humidity requirement for stick insects varies between species but is typically quite high; up to 80 per cent relative humidity for rain forest species.

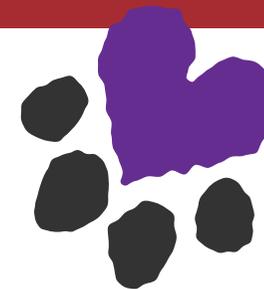
Water is essential for stick insects, so it is recommended to thoroughly mist the inside of the cage, including all the food plant material, each evening.

Some stick insects need open water in a very shallow, low-sided container to drink. Don't be too concerned if they leave their heads under water - insects breathe via their thoracic and abdominal spiracles (breathing tubes), not through their mouths like humans. However, this is not necessary for all species, so it is important to research the needs of the species you are caring for.

It is worth noting that in some areas tap water can harm certain species of stick insect, so it doesn't hurt to use clean rain water, or allow the tap water to stand in an open container for 24 hours to remove any trace of chlorine.

## FOOD AND WATER

Stick insects spend most of their lives climbing and feeding on leaves. Most species can be maintained on a diet of leaves of bramble



(blackberry) or rose. If picking leaves from the wild it is important to avoid any that have been treated with chemical sprays or near busy roads, and you should always wash them under running water before offering them to your pet.

Privet and ivy are available all-year-round and will be enjoyed by the Common Indian stick insect and other species such as the Peruvian stick insect will feed almost exclusively on privet.

The food, on a stem, should be placed upright in the bottom of the cage in a container of water, which cannot be knocked over or the water accessed. You can place netting over the water to ensure smaller stick insects cannot fall in and drown. A few dry twigs can be used as climbing frames too – place these as high in the cage as possible to allow your stick insect to hang from it when it needs to shed its skin. A block of floral foam can be used to help keep the stems stable and also hold water.

Your stick insect should never be without food. As soon as your pet has eaten all the leaves from a branch, or they have become too dry, replace with a fresh selection.

## HANDLING

Stick insects have very delicately formed bodies and limbs and so must be handled with great care. Some stick insects will shed their legs if roughly handled. Nymphs can be moved by encouraging them to crawl onto a leaf and then picking up the leaf.

Stick insects cannot bite you, although some species have spikes on their legs for pinching predators, such as Eurycantha and Heteropteryx. Anisomorpha buprestoides have a defensive spray, which can harm the eyes, so beware if caring for this species.

