

Creature Information

EARTHWORMS:

To house a dozen or so earthworms for a few days, place them in a cottage cheese carton or similar container half filled with moist soil. A lid with small holes punched in it will keep the worms from escaping. Earthworms like cool temperatures. If kept in the refrigerator, they will live for several weeks. (Just be sure to label the container.)

A breeding colony can be maintained in a larger container, such as a plastic tub, an aquarium, or even a large bucket. Soil mixed with leaf litter, compost, peat, sawdust, or cow manure makes a good medium for worms. Water the soil to keep it moist, but do not over water. Place two or three dozen earthworms on the surface and they will burrow into the soil. Add a thin layer of leaf litter or shredded newspaper to help reduce moisture loss.

Small amounts of food should be added to the surface. Earthworms will consume almost any kind of organic debris. They can be fed shredded bits of grass, dried leaves, lettuce, and apple or potato peels. Keep the earthworms in the coolest place in the room.

LAND SNAILS:

Snails can be found in leaf litter, under rocks or logs, and in other damp locations. They can be kept in transparent plastic shoeboxes or aquariums arranged to simulate the natural environment. Containers will need to be covered to maintain the necessary humidity and to keep snails from escaping, but will also need some ventilation. Soil on the bottom of the container will help to maintain the humidity.

Captive snails will consume a variety of foods: lettuce, carrots, apples, or celery will meet their needs.

TERESTRIAL ISOPODS (pill bugs, potato bugs):

Land isopods live in dark moist places. They are easily collected by turning over rotting logs, boards, bricks, or rocks. To keep classroom isopods, put 3 cm of potting soil in a plastic sweater box, or terrarium. Provide a dark place by setting a piece of corrugated cardboard on a few pebbles. Add a few pieces of decaying bark or wood. Sprinkle the container with water, making sure the habitat is damp but not saturated.

Feed the isopods a slice of potato, carrot, lettuce, or ripe fruit. Remove food that begins to mold. Cover the habitat with a lid that allows ventilation. You should see young in three to four weeks.

MEALWORMS:

Mealworms can be purchased at pet stores and bait shops. They can be kept in a ventilated, non-cardboard container. Mealworms come with a supply of food but will need to be given additional food if they are going to be kept for a long time. Any dry cereal will work as food, either flakes, oatmeal, or bran. Your mealworms will also need a source of water. Water can be provided by placing a slice of apple, carrot, or potato in with the mealworms.

Mealworms spend most of their lives in the larval stage, typically six to eight months.

CRICKETS:

Crickets can be purchased from most pet stores. To keep crickets for a short time in the classroom, place 2 - 4 cm of soil or sand in a jar or other container with a ventilated lid. Add a crumpled paper towel for the crickets to climb on and to provide hiding places. Crickets will eat a variety of foods; a slice of apple, carrot, or potato are good short-term foods and will provide the crickets with the moisture they need. Food should be replaced every day or two so it will not decay or mold.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Classroom Creature Culture Algae to Anoles by Carol D. Hampton; David C. Kramer (NSTA Publications)

Animals in the Classroom by David C. Kramer (Addison-Wesley Publishing Company)

Terrarium Habitats by Kimi Hosoume with Jacqueline Barber (University of California)

The Practical Entomologist by Rick Imes (Simon & Schuster Inc.)

National Science Education Standards National Research Council (National Academy Press)