

Hermit Crab Essentials Shopping Checklist

Hermit crabs are complex creatures who require a tropical environment to survive: approximately 80% Relative Humidity & 80F
Visit crabstreetjournal.org for more detailed information.

Glass tank with lid:

A glass tank with a glass or plexiglass lid will maintain the temperature and humidity in the crabitat. Starting with a 20 gallon tank is ideal for 2 or 3 crabs. If you can go bigger, you should. You can find cheap used tanks on Craigslist, in the newspaper or at yard sales.

Substrate:

The most popular substrates being play sand mixed with coco fiber bedding (sold in compressed bricks). Small to medium hermit crabs should have 6 inches of substrate. Large hermit crabs should have 8-10 inches of substrate. A jumbo hermit crab needs at least 12 inches of substrate. Deep, moist substrate is essential for successful molting. Play sand can be purchased at hardware stores. Coco fiber can be purchased online.

Under Tank Heater:

An Under Tank Heater (UTH) or a seedling heat pad can be used to warm your crabitat. UTH's work more effectively when placed on the wall of the tank and then covered with an insulating material to direct the heat inward. Options: heat tape, thermo panels, or Reflectix insulation (sold in a roll at hardware stores), foam board, Styrofoam with aluminum foil between.

Overhead light:

Hermit crabs require normal 12 hour cycles of day light and darkness at all times. UVB is believed to be beneficial but there is no research to confirm. UV lights must be mounted inside the tank to be effective. A 5.0 bulb is standard. You can use a UVB or LED bulb to provide day light. You can use a red or blue LED for nighttime viewing but the crabs don't require light at night. For inexperienced pet owners we do not recommend using a heat lamp or emitter in place of a heat pad, it is challenging to control the environment with these products.

Dishes:

You will need a fresh water pool, ocean water pool, and a food dish, non-metallic. Pools should be deep enough for your crabs to submerge in. You can use plastic storage bowls or even plastic paint trays as pools. Food dishes can be scallop sea shells.

Food:

Feeding commercial foods is not recommended. The only exceptions are foods that are free of chemicals. Land hermit crabs are omnivorous scavengers so they can eat a wide variety of foods. All foods should be free of chemicals and table salt. Find food lists on our site.

Thermometer:

A quality thermometer is recommended to monitor air temperature in the crabitat.

Hygrometer:

A hygrometer is used to observe the humidity inside the tank. Analog hygrometers must be calibrated. A digital combo unit is a perfect solution for monitoring temperature and humidity. A digital hygrometer must be calibrated but can't be adjusted the way most analog can be.

Water Treatment:

It is important to remove harmful substances from tap water such as chlorine, chloramines and heavy metals, which can kill hermit crabs. Prime is the commonly used product for this.

Ocean Salt:

You should use a salt mix intended for salt water aquariums. Fresh water salt is not the same and does not meet the needs of land hermit crabs. Never use table salt. Instant Ocean is the commonly used product.

Shells:

Your hermit crab will require about 3 spare shells to choose from (per crab). A properly fitting shell will allow your hermit crab to fully retract and close off the opening with its large pincher. You can buy proper shells online. NO PAINTED SHELLS. Painted shells are toxic and dangerous.

Extras - Optional extras

If you are having trouble maintaining a consistent temperature in your crabitat a thermostat and rheostat can help. A power strip with a timer makes easy work of switching lights and heat pads off and on automatically.

Moss is an excellent way to create and maintain humidity in your tank. Your hermit crabs will love a big pile of moss to hide under and munch on.

A mister bottle is not a sufficient means for maintaining humidity but can be used to keep your moss damp. Can also be used for misting seeds for sprouting.

Water pool amendments to prevent drowning: glass stone, river pebbles, plastic canvas or Gutter Guard can all be used to provide traction in the pools. Use aquarium sealant to secure or GE silicone (regular NOT the mildew resistant one).

Plastic or fabric plants and vines provide a more natural environment. Avoid fake plants with wire, which can rust or poke into the abdomen.

Substrate enhancements

The basic substrate mix of play sand and coco fiber is sufficient but you want to create a more realistic environment you can add some additional items to the substrate. If you can mix these in at the time you are setting up your tank that is ideal. Once your crabs are down molting it's difficult to add more items. You can add coco bark (often sold as Orchid Bark), crushed oyster shells. Leaf litter and moss should NOT be mixed in. This is a change in recommendations after a mold outbreak in the moss.

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