

# GIANT MILLIPEDES

Millipedes are fascinating creatures to keep. The giant tropical species are very similar to our own garden millipedes, but can grow to 28cm long. They are usually imported from Africa, South America and Malaysia. The African is most common but appear to be less active during the day than the others. Giant millipedes are generally dark brown in colour with orange bands around the segments. Their bodies are made up of many segments and they have approximately 240 legs. When a millipede is scared it will curl up into a tight ball until it feels the danger has passed. They can live for several years and become quite tame. It is not a good idea to handle millipedes too much as some species exude a noxious fluid, the fluid can be slightly acidic and sting if not washed off immediately. Sometimes the fluid is nothing more than a dye, which will leave a temporary stain on the skin.

## HOUSING

Giant Millipedes are best kept in a fish tank with a lid. The lid is necessary as millipedes will sometimes rear up on their tails when they are wandering around, they can be quite active and must therefore be given enough room to wander. The tank should be as large as possible and I have found that millipedes being non-aggressive animals can be kept with a variety of other small creatures i.e.. cockroaches, crickets, beetles. The tank should contain approximately 8cm of peat, with leaf litter placed on top. Some pieces of bark and moss make a nice display and a small houseplant can help maintain humidity. The tank should be heated to provide a temperature of around 20c-25c. Millipedes will usually shy away from a light bulb, the best form of heating is a heating mat placed under the tank or a heating pad buried in the peat. I keep my millipedes in a large tank with a heating pad buried at one end, this way the millipedes can get away from the heat if they wish to. Millipedes like to burrow and may stay underground for some time.

## FEEDING

In the wild giant millipedes are very efficient at clearing the forest floor, they feed on decaying leaves and turn them into a rich compost. In captivity they can be fed leaf litter collected from below trees and hedges. I have found oak leaf litter to be their favourite. Millipedes will also feed on small amounts of fruit and vegetables, particularly soft fruits. A bowl of water can be provided for your millipedes, but this is not usually necessary as they generally obtain enough moisture from burrowing in the leaves and peat, which should always be kept moist and never allowed to dry.

## BREEDING

Millipedes lay their eggs in the peat and leaves, some species build a nest to protect the eggs. It is important not to disturb the eggs while they are developing. The tiny young that emerge from the peat are exact replicas of their parents. It is not always easy to tell the sex of millipedes, the male's sexual organs are on the seventh segment and this segment therefore does not have any legs. If there are legs on the seventh segment the specimen is either a female or an immature male. When mating two millipedes will wrap their bodies around each other, if this occurs you should be careful not to disturb them.