

# How Do I Care For My Hermit Crabs?

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Because hermit crabs are considered cheap, disposable living toys, thousands die every year from neglect. At the root of the high mortality of captive hermit crabs is the failure to provide a proper environment.

We're going to teach you how to set it up properly.

## How Do I House Them?

Here are the items you will need:

- a minimum of a 10 gallon (preferably 20 gallon) glass aquarium
- a secure fitting lid
- a heat lamp fixture with an appropriate wattage heat bulb
- a fresh water dish, a salt water dish, a food dish
- substrate (enough to fill ½ of your aquarium)
- decoration
- a variety of shells the same size and slightly larger than the one your crab resides in now
- a good book on hermit crabs (stay off of the internet – there's too much bad info there)

Remember, you're trying to recreate an environment that is like a tropical beach. Not so much the shore, but where the beach meets the rainforest.

The most important part is going to be the substrate or ground layer. The deeper down you dig on the beach, the more moist it gets, until you eventually hit water. The idea here is to keep the bottom moist, and the top dry.

First, put down an undergravel filter plate with the plastic tube coming up one of the back corners. Next add 2" of fine grade aquarium gravel and top this off with 4"-6" of beach sand or calcium sand. The point of using a finer grade of aquarium gravel is to help prevent the even finer grade of sand from draining into the spaces in the gravel. Now by pouring fresh filtered water down the tube you can watch the water level fill to the gravel line. The bottom portion of sand will soak up some of the water while your heat light keeps the top portion warm and dry. The deeper your crab digs, the more moist and cool it will get – just like the beach. You can also mix the sand 50/50 with the coconut fiber bricks to get an environment closer to the forest edge.

Your crabs are going to be most active at night when the lights go off. At this time, they will explore everything in search of new shells and food. You can create a jungle gym using cork bark, vines and rocks. Add some fake plants and some dry leaf litter (a dead palm leaf if you want to stay tropical). All this will give hiding spots during the day and enrich the crabs' environment at night.

## How Do I Feed and Water Them?

First you will need 3 shallow dishes. One for food, one for freshwater, and one for saltwater.

Feeding is the easy part. Hermit crabs eat everything! Being an opportunistic scavenger, they will eat fruits and vegetables, nuts, peanut butter, insects, dead animals and even feces. There are commercial hermit crab diets, fish flakes and turtle pellets they will likely indulge in.

Fresh water can be as simple as using bottled water, or get a dechlorinator from the fish section of your pet store. ZooMed makes a solution kit for your saltwater dish. We recommend using a 750mL water bottle and adding 3 teaspoons of this solution and mark it "salt". Keep this bottle nearby for a quick and easy change.

### **Why Can't I Keep Them In A Plastic Critter Keeper With An Inch Of Sand And An Undertank Heater?**

Wow, did you ever get some bad information!!! Let's take a second and think about this. Having and keeping a pet isn't about cutting corners and finding out what you can get away with. As a pet owner, it is your duty to provide your pet with the best possible quality of life you can. Your pet is depending on you, and in return for a job well done you will be rewarded with an opportunity to discover so much more about your animals' natural routines and behavior. Just because a pet may be inexpensive, doesn't mean it doesn't deserve the same treatment and attention an expensive pet would get. If you aren't prepared to do what is right, than just don't do it in the first place.

In a plastic container, your hermit crab may do well for a couple months or more – at least until it is time to molt or shed its exoskeleton and grow to its next size. At this time, your crab is going to need to burrow and leave its shell for an extended period of time (approximately 10-14 days). In a shallow, dry substrate the soft abdomen of your crab will surely dehydrate and this will lead to its death.

In your world, does the sun come from the sky, or from underground? Then why would you use anything but overhead lighting? Is there a day and a night cycle in your 24 hour day? Then why are you keeping your crab in darkness all the time? When you are walking barefoot on a hot beach does it get cooler if you dig down in the sand or hotter? Then why would you even consider using an undertank heater to heat your crabs' environment? Not to mention that with a proper minimum 6" substrate, an undertank heater just wouldn't penetrate to warm the surface.

The more you think like a crab, and use some common sense, the better off your crab will be!