



## Taming Tarantulas

Owning a pet tarantula can be an exciting experience. This peculiar pet has a unique list of pros and cons and understanding these is essential to being a competent arachnid owner. Quiet, easy to clean and maintain, requiring a small amount of space, odorless, educational, beautiful, and artists of webestry, this is one pet that continues to gain popularity in the pet trade.



There are over 800 species of tarantulas belonging to the family *Theraphosidae*. They are native to many areas and climates - arid, subtropical and tropical. They are roughly divided into two groups: "old world" (from the eastern hemisphere) and "new world" (from the western hemisphere).

With most species of tarantula, the toxicity of their venom is much like that of a bee or wasp sting. It is most likely to cause a local reaction including pain, redness, and swelling. Another concern with regards to handling tarantulas is irritation and itching from special hairs found on some new world tarantulas. These tarantulas possess what are called "urticating" (itch-causing) hairs on their abdomens, which they can release by vigorously rubbing their abdomens if threatened. These can cause inflammation and pain. While all of these concerns seem contrary to owning a pet, more peaceful species can be handled with caution.

Now that we've discussed preliminary concerns and outstanding benefits of owning a pet tarantula, we can talk about choosing and taking care of our small pet. Try to find out the scientific name for the spider (as that will be the best way to get the appropriate care information) and make sure the age and gender are known. Below we will cover some of the best species of pet tarantulas.

This is a list of the most favorite pet tarantulas and any beginner interested in the hobby should start with:



### **Brachypelma albopilosum (Curly Hair)**

A gentle terrestrial with a medium growth rate, the "Honduran Curly Hair" is renowned for its calm disposition and ease of care.

### **Euathlus sp. Red (Chilean Flame)**

"Adorable". Maxing out at about 3.5-3.75", the Euathlus sp red is a calm, gentle, inquisitive species and a wonderful beginner.



### **Grammostola pulchra (Brazilian black)**

Sometimes referred to as "The Black Lab of Tarantulas", the G. pulchra is a jet black gentle giant. Reaching sizes of 8", this heavy-bodied pet is recognized for its very calm nature and is usually a species that is reluctant to flick hair and tolerates

handling well.

### **Brachypelma smithi (Mexican Red Knee)**

One of the most gorgeous and long-lived species (at least in my opinion) is also one of the best starter tarantulas. With its fiery red/yellow/orange leg markings set against the dark brown/black base color, this is one awesome showcase animal.





## Grammostola pulchripes (Chaco Golden Knee)

The *G. pulchripes* or “Chaco Golden Knee” is a beautiful terrestrial species that can reach an impressive size of 8”. Like other Grammostolas, this one is a slow grower, taking many years to reach maturity. However, the *G. pulchripes* is generally recognized as having a very calm disposition, which makes it a wonderful candidate as a first tarantula. Many point to this species as one of the ones most tolerable of handling.

## Grammostola rosea (Chilean rose)

For years, the *G. rosea* (or “Rosie”, as it’s often referred to) was the most recommended beginner species. This readily available, inexpensive tarantula is recognized for its extreme hardiness and an ideal disposition.



## Chromatopelma cyaneopubescens (Greenbottle Blue)

This stunning species sports amazing colors, and its easy husbandry makes it a wonderful entry-level tarantula.

### Enclosures

A large enclosure isn't necessary but if you have an arboreal species of tarantula you will need a tall cage and a burrowing type will need appropriate substrate or hiding places. Generally, spiders should be housed one to a cage as they are not social.

For burrowing or terrestrial spiders, a general rule of thumb is that the cage should be



approximately 3 times the leg span long and 2 times the leg span wide. The height should not be much more than the length of the spider - these spiders are heavy and if they climb and fall it can be dangerous, even fatal. 2.5 or 5 gallon aquariums work well. A larger tank is not better in this case, as tarantulas do not need a lot of extra space and a large tank may make prey harder to find.

The arboreal tarantulas need a cage that is tall to provide climbing room with branches, twigs, or some other structure on which the spider can construct its web. A 10 gallon aquarium set on one end can work well for this purpose. They do need to have a very secure lid, as they can be escape artists but the lid must also allow adequate ventilation. On the bottom, a substrate of vermiculite, or vermiculite mixed with varying ratios of potting soil and/or peat, should be provided at least 2-4 inches deep to provide burrowing room and to hold moisture. Wood chips, especially cedar, should be avoided. A place to hide should also be provided to your tarantula. A piece of cork bark, a half hollow log (as available from pet stores), or half a clay flower pot on its side.

Appropriate temperatures and humidity must be maintained, but this is where the various species have different requirements. For tarantulas that do not require high humidity levels (arid/desert species) a heat pad should be applied to the bottom of the tank to maintain a dry environment, while a shallow water dish with a damp sponge should be provided for humidity. It is essential dry land species never stand in water or are directly sprayed with water. For those that require higher humidity a shallow water dish and misting provides the most effective method. In any case, temperature and humidity gauges should be used to monitor conditions. At the higher temperatures, extra care must be taken to ensure adequate humidity levels. At the same time, excess humidity can encourage mold growth and should be avoided.

The cage should not need cleaning frequently. For spiders kept at a relatively low humidity level, four times a year is likely enough (earlier if mold,



fungus or mites are noticed). For those kept in a more humid environment, this will need to be done more often.

Molting is how the spider grows to a larger size - by shedding the old exoskeleton and producing a new one. This is a stressful time for a spider and also when humidity levels are most critical. The spider stops eating and then will lay on it's back to molt. The molting process may take several hours.

Once the old exoskeleton is shed it will take several days for the new one to harden (this is when growth occurs) and the spider should not be fed during this time as it is vulnerable to injury and even death from something as small as a cricket. In addition, the spider should never be handled during the molting and hardening time. It may take up to two weeks for the spider to fully recover after molting.

While a tarantula may become acclimated to being held on the hand, if it suddenly runs or jumps it may fall and the injuries sustained could be fatal. Even a minor fall can kill a heavy bodied tarantula if the abdomen ruptures. This should be one of the largest concerns to a tarantula owner.

**After reading this article, you should feel prepared for the genuinely unique pet experience that tarantulas can be. If these majestic and quiet beauties intrigue you, stop in to WPC to begin your journey!**