

# Keeping a Pet Locust

## An Introductory Information Leaflet

from

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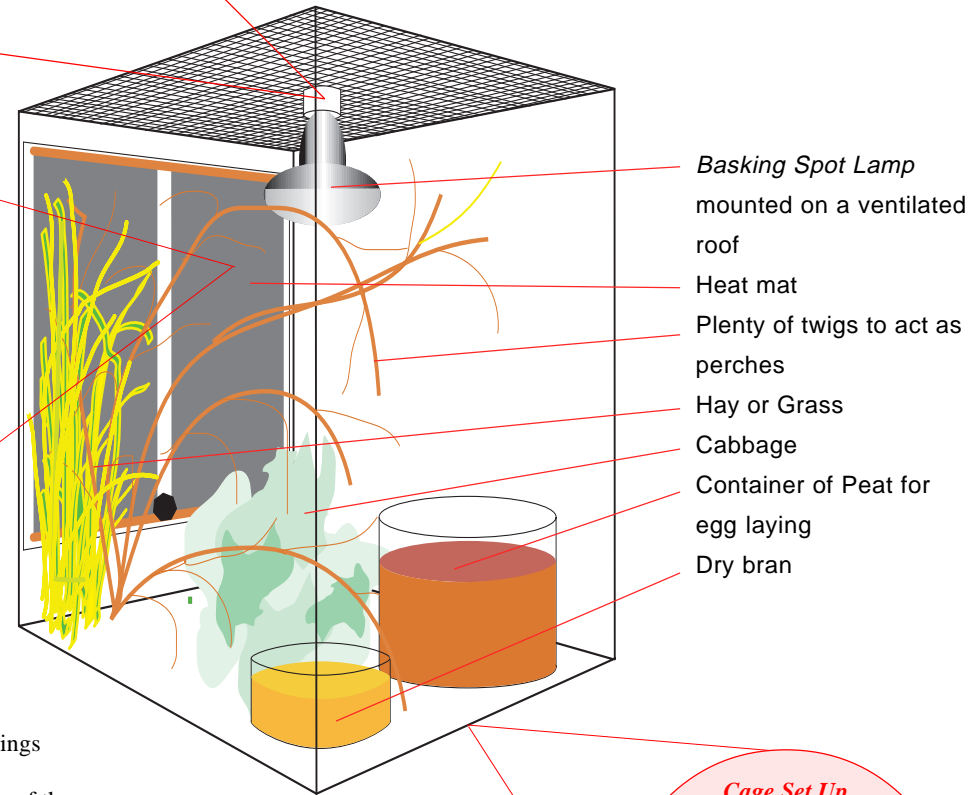
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**Lighting**  
Locusts thrive under bright lights, so artificial light in the cage is a must. Radiant heat is also needed so both light and heat may be provided with a suitable *Basking Spotlamp*. The temperature at the hottest part of the cage should be between 34°C and 36°C. This can be maintained for about ten hours each day.

**Background Heat**  
Use a heat mat to cover most of the rear wall. This provides background heat and may be left on all the time. It should not allow the temperature to drop below 20°C. If the temperature is too hot put the whole cage in a cooler place but if the temperature is not hot enough, use a higher wattage spotlamp.

**Food:** Mainly fresh leafy vegetables. Things like cabbage and kale are the best of the purchasable foods and are better than any of the lettuces which are too watery. Choose the loose leafed green varieties over the white, tightly packed types. Another commonly fed leaf are those of cereals and grasses. In fact almost all leafy foods may be eaten, just experiment with anything edible to see if it stimulates the appetite of the locust! Be careful not to give leaves from the garden and elsewhere that have been sprayed with insecticide!

**Cleanliness and Hygiene:** The cage will need cleaning out about once each week. A routine cleaner for all nonporous surfaces would be *Vetaclene*, followed by a thorough rinse and dry. All other materials should be replaced when soiled. Any first aid the locust may need, can be given by dabbing the wound with *Vetadine*. As far as human hygiene is concerned, *Vetasept Surgical Scrub* will clean hands and surfaces while *Vetasept Hand Rub* will allow adequate cleansing and disinfection even in cases when water is unavailable.



### A Cage Suitable for Keeping Pet Locusts

**Cage Set Up**  
The cage should be set up to allow an active locust plenty of scope to climb, warm itself, move to a cooler place and look for food. They may want to secrete themselves into refuges and hang protected when shedding

# Shopping List

Not every thing is needed to begin with, usually one item from each of the categories marked •. As a basic starting point the following essentials are considered the minimum needed:

## Plastic Cage Heat Mat Basking Spotlamp & Holder Thermometer

After a while as your collection and experience grows other alternatives and extras can be used.

- **HabiStat Heat Mats** (4x5/4w, 6x11/7w, 11x11/12w, 17x11/20w, 23x11/28w, 29x11/35w, 35x11/42w & 49x11/55w) & **Strips** (17x6/10w, 23x6/15w, 35x6/22w & 47x6/30w)
- **Thermometers** (Alcohol, dial, minimum - maximum & electronic digital)
- **Hygrometers** (Dial & electronic digital)
- **HabiStat Thermostats** (Mat-Stat/100w, Temperature/300w, Twin/2x300, Pulse Proportional/600w, Dimming/600w & Night Time Drop Function)
- **Basking Spotlamps**, Natural, Daylight & Red, 100w & 40w
- **Basking Spotlamp Holders**
- **Vetaclean**
- **Vetasept Surgical Scrub**
- **Vetasept Hand Rub**
- **Books & Leaflets**

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## Pet Locust...

### ...Biology

Locusts are insects that are almost indistinguishable from crickets and grasshoppers. The difference being that they sometimes congregate into swarms instead of leading a solitary existence. When this happens they become a serious threat to vast swathes of vegetation and agricultural crops. They have a direct life cycle, where the young develop as a series of nymphs which look like smaller versions of the adult. Some more advanced insects like beetles, go through an indirect life cycle and develop via a larva and pupa. Some locust species make very good pet animals and are the subject of this leaflet. Pet locusts will not infest the home if they escape and they have none of the stigma attached to them that is associated with their more verminous wild cousins.

Some of the best pet species is the Desert Locust *Schistocerca gregaria* but the Migratory Locust *Locusta migrator* is also available and is equally interesting to keep. Desert Locusts like broad leaves to eat whilst the Migratory Locust is mainly a grass feeder.

The types considered here are tropical and are on the whole, quite large insects. Like all insects, locusts have a tough exoskeleton, two pairs of wings and three pairs of jointed legs.

As the locust grows it will moult its outer skin periodically. On no account should it be touched or interfered with during this process. It will cast off the old skin and the emerged locust will often have regrown any legs that have been shed. The locust will be very soft and pale and may take a hour or two to harden off, during which time it will not feed. After the final moult the adults are pinkish in colour and rather delicate. They should not be interfered with until they have assumed their final colouration of yellow for males and buff for females.

### ...Housing

The permanent cage need not be very large, 28 cm. x 16 cm. x 10 cm. is enough for a couple of adult pairs. The cage should be set up in a manner similar to the diagram overleaf. A heater can be installed to provide a background temperature of between 25°C and 35°C. This is best done with an *HabiStat* mat or strip taped to the inside of the back wall of a wooden cage or either side if the wall is glass or plastic. Make sure the mat acts like a radiator, and that the edges are well stuck down. A free plastic edge is likely to be nibbled by the insects but any exposed adhesive will act like a fly paper and may well prove lethal!

A daytime hotspot up to 36°C is best provided by a Basking Spotlamp. This will also give out a good deal of light, which is also appreciated.

Much of the success achieved in keeping locusts will come from the skilful manipulation of ventilation. These animals like a very dry atmosphere and a good deal of ventilation. Fresh air moving into the cage is essential. Use the upward draughts caused by heated air rising to flush out the cage and drag fresh air in. Do not give water, as any dampness kills them off quite quickly. All the moisture they require is in the fresh leafy food they eat.

### ...Husbandry

Locusts are gregarious and look best as in groups. If they are kept on their own, especially during the early stages, they develop into what looks like an entirely different animal. This is the soli-

tary phase and most often takes the form of just another large green grasshopper.

These animals do not really like being handled, so if it is necessary to move them, pick them up in an enclosed hand. They have two defences other than fleeing. One is to sick up some fluid that may stain the hand and the other is to kick out with spiky legs and feet. This will give the sensation of tiny pin pricks but is not at all dangerous.

The cage will have to be cleaned out as faeces and debris builds up. About once each week is sensible for pet locusts. The cage set up advised in this leaflet is practicable and can be made to look pleasing to the eye. It can be made to look quite natural even without using live plants which are best left until some experience is gained. In any case, some of the very informative books on insects in general and locusts in particular could be investigated.

### ...Food & Feeding

Locusts are not at all fussy about their food and will eat almost any leafy vegetation and a whole lot more besides. Feeding pet locusts is easy and the best foods seem to be fresh cabbage and grass. They prefer the green leafy types. The tightly packed white leaves of many varieties are not particularly relished. In addition some dry bran and hay are quite suitable and extremely convenient food that will not deteriorate in the dry heat of the cage.

Feed the locusts each day with fresh food so that it is almost all gone by the time of the next feed. Dry food like hay and bran, can be left in the cage indefinitely.

Drinking water is not necessary; indeed if it is given it will almost certainly cause more harm than good. Locusts get all they need from the fresh vegetation they eat. Even then, they can use water chemically locked in the food if extra supplies are needed. Dampness, even slightly raised humidity, will cause problems and must be avoided.

### ...Reproduction

To sex a locust, inspect the tail-end of the abdomen. Males have slightly larger cerci or small feelers. Adults are also easily sexed by colour, yellow for males and beige/buff for females. Mature males will sit on the back of females prior to mating.

Breeding is not at all difficult, just put mature males and females together in a half decent environment and nature will do the rest. Locusts lay an egg pod containing several dozen eggs. This is buried in a damp medium; sand and peat have been used successfully.

### ...Health & Disease

Locusts may take several weeks to reach adult, it will depend on temperature, food availability and stocking density. Once adult, life expectancy is usually just a few more weeks. They do not suffer from many diseases and special attention is rarely needed. An environment and diet as described in this leaflet will preclude most problems. Good practice, hygiene and first aid will probably deal with rest. If real disease or injury is discovered, a suitable authority may of course, be consulted. Pet locusts do not pose a real threat to human health. An allergy may develop in sensitive individuals but will resolve as soon as contact is ceased. All the normal hygiene precautions regarding humans and animals should be observed.