

# Hermit Crab Care Guide

## Live Material Care Guide

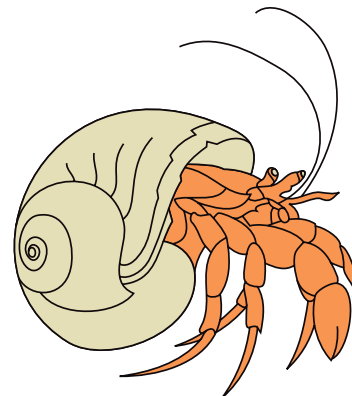


## Introduction

Use the following care guide to learn how to care for hermit crabs.

## Background

Terrestrial hermit crabs, genus *Coenobita*, are very interesting crustaceans to study. Hermit crabs do not produce their own shells, but instead find empty shells to inhabit. They have 10 legs, two claws (one large, one small), and except for their soft, spiral-shaped abdomens, are covered by a hard exoskeleton. Therefore, the shell protects the abdomen. There are no visible distinguishing factors between male and female hermit crabs—both have a carapace (main body) ranging from 1–2 inches in size. All crabs molt their exoskeletons, and are able to regenerate lost appendages at any time. Hermit crabs are great subjects for behavioral studies and are relatively easy to maintain in the classroom.



## Care and Maintenance

Hermit crabs require a diet rich in calcium, carotene and antioxidants. Purchasing a balanced hermit crab food is one way to accomplish this (such as Flinn Catalog No. FB1903) however, fresh food is also acceptable. Their carotene requirement can be fulfilled by eating brightly-colored vegetables such as corn and carrots. They can also eat meat, dry dog food, vegetables and fruit. They also need calcium which is added to their water or add a cuttle bone or egg shells.

Hermit crabs prefer temperatures no less than 72 °F. If they are consistently exposed to temperatures that are too low, they will likely not survive. Conversely, if the environment is too hot, the crabs will overheat, causing a slow and painful death. A reptile heating pad (FB0400) or a heating lamp will ensure steady warm temperatures for the animal.

Hermit crabs require a tropical environment with at least 70% humidity as they breathe using gills which must remain moist. This can be achieved by placing a natural sponge in a dish of water. The sponge distributes humidity because it absorbs the water from the dish and disperses it throughout its large surface area. Misting their tank daily with dechlorinated water is also typically necessary.

A container with a large floor area and a secure lid makes an ideal habitat for most hermit crabs. They require room to walk around and exercise. The tank can be lined with either silica-free sand, coconut fiber (FB1352) or a mixture of both. Any type or color of silica-free sand is sufficient as long as it is clean and not chemically treated. Simply waft the sand and as long it does not have a characteristic chemical smell or musty odor it is okay to use. The substrate should be deep enough for the crab to bury itself but not so deep that the heating pad is ineffective. Change the substrate if it develops a foul smell.

Chlorine must be removed from water that will be used for drinking or bathing. If crabs are continuously exposed to chlorine, blisters will form on their gills resulting in suffocation and death. Chlorine can be removed from the water using dechlorinator such as Flinn Catalog No. FB0249. Make sure the water is not too deep the crabs will drown. Never use a metal dish for hermit crabs' water as they are extremely sensitive to metals. The top and bottom of a clean Petri dish works well.

Hermit crabs like hiding places and also places to climb. Decorate their habitat with thick branches and “huts.” A secure lid is necessary due to their ability to climb.

Hermit crabs need both a fresh water bowl and a salt water bowl. Use marine salts for their salt source. Never use table salt. Add 1–2 g marine salt per 100 mL of chlorine-free water.

## Safety Precautions

*Hermit crab pincers can hurt or cut skin. Be careful when handling the animal. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water before leaving the laboratory. Follow all laboratory safety guidelines.*

### Tips

- Hermit crabs are very active after a bath. Tip the hermit crabs over under the surface of the dechlorinated water to flood their shell. Do not leave them underwater for too long as they will drown. Pour remaining water out of the shell and watch them roam.
- If possible, purchase more than one hermit crab. Despite their name they do like to be around other crabs as they would be found in nature.
- The following web site is extremely helpful in learning how to care for hermit crabs. [www.hermit-crabs.com](http://www.hermit-crabs.com)
- After molting, do not remove the exoskeleton from the terrarium. It contains nutrients vital to the freshly molted crab, and the hermit crab will consume it within a few days following the molt.
- Hermit crabs are very curious creatures and will walk off the edge of tabletops, lab benches, etc. Watch them closely to prevent harmful falls.
- Never attempt to remove a hermit crab from its shell. Crabs will sacrifice a limb before giving up their shell, and may pinch in defense.
- Be prepared for long term care because hermit crabs can live in captivity for seven years or more.

### Disposal

Please consult your current *Flinn Scientific Catalog/Reference Manual* for general guidelines and specific procedures, and review all federal, state and local regulations that may apply, before proceeding. Crabs may be kept in a habitat described above after observation is over. Deceased crabs may be disposed of according to Flinn Suggested Biological Waste Method VI. Never release hermit crabs or other animals into the wild.

**Materials to properly care for *Hermit Crabs* are available from Flinn Scientific, Inc.**

| Catalog No. | Description                  |
|-------------|------------------------------|
| FB1352      | Compressed Bedding           |
| FB1903      | Hermit Crab Food, 2.4 oz     |
| FB0400      | Heater, 4" x 5"              |
| FB0513      | Plastic Animal Cage, X-Large |

Consult your *Flinn Scientific Catalog/Reference Manual* for current prices.