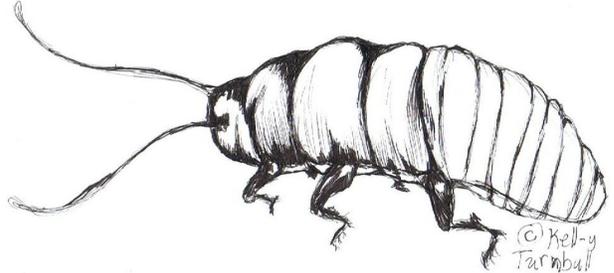


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Madagascar Hissing Cockroach

Gromphadorhina portentosa



Necessities:

- 10 gal slide-top tank
- Light fixture
- Red light bulbs
- Tank liner
- Coconut fiber
- Cork bark
- De-chlorinator
- Spray bottle
- Food dish
- Petroleum jelly
- Reptile heating pad

GENERAL:

Madagascar Hissing Cockroaches, native to the Island of Madagascar near Africa, are found feeding on rotting logs and are one of the largest cockroaches in the world. Compared to the cockroaches native to the Americas, they are much slower moving and more fun to watch! They do not bite and are an easy insect to hold.

Males, females and babies (called nymphs) after about their fourth instar (molt) will emit a hissing sound by expelling air from spiracles (breathing holes on the sides of their body) when agitated. Males also hiss when fighting, to define territory, to court a female and to identify other known males or intruding males. Males will fight by seeing who has the bigger hiss or head butt each other to exert dominance. They rarely cause each other harm.

They are wingless and a beautiful chocolate brown color unless they have just molted (shedding their skin by splitting down the middle of their back), exposing a new white exoskeleton (shell) underneath. This new skin will within a few hours harden and turn brown again. They also have dark orange marks on the abdomen. Males develop what looks like horns on the top of their head and have bushy antenna and grow up to 4 inches. They can live 2-5 years in a well-maintained terrarium.

They mate end to end with the male pushing his abdomen along and under the female's body until he reaches her abdomen's end and engages with her. The female produces 30 to 60 eggs that are stored in an ootheca (egg case) that can be carried inside or outside the body for 60 days. When the eggs hatch, the nymphs emerge. They go through about 6 molts in 7 months to maturity. The parents and nymphs will generally stay in close contact with each other.

DIET:

In their native habitat they are an important part of the ecological system as they eat and break down rotting logs and vegetation. In a home terrarium they are easy to feed with dog food, vegetable matter placed in a small ceramic dish, and a daily misting with de-chlorinated (not filtered) water. Do not overfeed or leave moldy food in the cage. The nymphs make a great food item for most reptiles.

HOUSING:

Madagascar Hissing Cockroaches need to be housed in an escape-proof terrarium with petroleum jelly smeared along the inside top edge of the glass. They are excellent glass climbers! Coconut fiber substrate kept moist with de-chlorinated water (taking care not to let it mold) works the best. Cork bark is an excellent climbing surface for them. They need minimal heat which they can usually receive from the light on top. They do best at about 75-80° with heavy humidity. If your home is cold, they will benefit from a reptile heating pad on the underside (outside) of the terrarium bottom. They do not like light. By using a red light bulb you will be able to enjoy their activity.

Clean the terrarium at least once a month. Remove the soil, making sure you have found all the nymphs first. (I usually put the coconut fiber in a bucket and fill with water just to make sure). Wash everything off with a 10% bleach solution and rinse thoroughly. Although they have not been known to live outside here in Washington, please do not take any chances. The introduction of non-native species to our environment can be devastating and we can lose our ability to have this wonderful insect as a pet.

HANDLING:

These guys are easy to handle. Make sure to wash your hands with soap and water and rinse thoroughly before and after handling. DO NOT USE HAND SANITIZERS before handling. Scoot them off the surface they are on and on to your hand. They generally will hold on for dear life and even when they move you can keep up with them. Make sure you stay stable and calm so they do not accidentally fall and injure themselves. They have few health problems other than dehydration or the introduction of mites. If you watch carefully you will be able to identify different personalities and favorite resting places for each one.