

FEEDING INVERTEBRATE PREY

The simple fact is that if you want to have healthy insect eating reptiles and/or amphibians YOU will have to feed the prey. Most prey species are not fed or watered properly during the transition from the breeder to your house. And the old adage holds true, "you are what you eat." If you feed your reptiles/amphibians malnourished prey, they will become malnourished also. The following is a small list of suggestions on diets for your invertebrate prey species. There are MANY diets out there, these should be able to get you started. A few additional notes regarding buying and housing these invertebrates are added where appropriate.

Crickets: Do not buy adult crickets – a cricket's life span is only 60 days. When full grown, they only have a few weeks left. Also remember that a few smaller invertebrates are more nutritious than one large invertebrate because the exoskeleton is largely indigestible and smaller invertebrates have a smaller exoskeleton to insect ratio. Keep your crickets in an enclosed, warm (80-85 degrees F) container with good ventilation. Crickets need space and hiding places – place egg cartons at the sides of the container. Crickets are omnivorous and will eat each other if not well fed.

Feed your crickets:

@Tropical Fish Flakes
@Ground rodent chow with calcium powder
@A blenderized mixture of fresh vegetables (dark, leafy greens, an orange vegetable, parsnips) with alfalfa pellets, and a reptile multi-vitamin and calcium supplement

@For water sources you can use a sponge soaked in water in a shallow bowl, or slices of potato, fruit, and other vegetables

Mealworms (*Tenebrio*):

@Fresh bran mixed with a high protein Baby cereal (or crushed alfalfa hay), or chicken layer mash

@For water sources use slices of fruits and vegetables.

King Worms (*Zoophorba*)

@Alfalfa pellets mixed with chicken egg layer pellets, crumble or mashed; Bird seed or cockatiel mix may be added. This can also serve as bedding.

@For water sources, use slices of fruits and vegetables

To keep Kingworms from metamorphosing into pupae and beetles, KEEP IN THE REFRIGERATOR.

Fruit Flies

@8 bananas
¼ C. sugar
oatmeal (rolled oats)
1-packet bakers yeast

Put banana and sugar into a blender and mix until banana is liquefied. Mix in oatmeal until it becomes firm, but still moist. Put mixture into wide mouth canning jars. Add a few granules of baker's yeast to the surface and add about 30 fruit flies. Cap the jars with paper towels folded into fourths held on by a rubber band. Can also use 1-C. banana, 1-C. applesauce, 1-T. vinegar, and 2 cups oatmeal blended together.

There are many more variations on diets available through reptile magazines and the Internet. The important thing is to start with a good diet for your prey so that they can fully nourish your pet. Many reptile/amphibian authorities also recommend feeding locally caught wild insects for trace minerals. If you are doing this it is important to use insects from an area that is NOT treated with pesticides/herbicides of any kind. It is also important to realize that not all insects are edible for reptiles/amphibians and the reptile/amphibian pet doesn't always know what's good for them. Several bearded dragons died recently after firefly ingestion. So it is imperative that you stick to insect species you can readily identify and those which your pet has already consumed without ill effects.

An excellent website with directions on feeding your invertebrate prey is www.anapsid.com. This site also gives detailed directions on housing your insects. Also consider the source of your insects. Wild caught insects and those bought from bait stores can carry parasites to your pet. This is another reason to bring annual stool samples to your veterinarian for examination.